This Month:

With this issue, PARTISAN REVIEW AND ANVIL are combining to publish a new literary monthly. Though continuing the traditions of its predecessors, the new magazine will be broader in scope and, we believe, more mature. We invite contributions from writers the country over, and letters from readers on their reactions to our policy as well as specific stories, poems and articles.

Grade Crossing is from JOHN DOS PASSOS's work in progress, *The Big Money,* a continuation of *The 42nd Parallel* and *1919.*

ILDEFONZO PEREDA VALDES is the author of numerous books of poetry, fiction and criticism. He is a defense attorney for the International Red Aid, a leading member of the Anti-War Committee of Uruguay, and a professor of Castilian literature at the University of Montevideo.

CARL VAN DOREN's essay is a re-written version of his address at the Book Union dinner. As Mr. Van Doren writes: "I have made a new draft of it for you, keeping close to the original and trying to make it say to the reader what the speech said to its hearers."

JAMES NEUGASS's poems have appeared in two recent anthologies of modern American verse. He lives in New York City.

In the Heart of Darkness is a selection from *Days of Wrath,* ANDRE MALRAUX's latest work, which deals with the imprisonment of a German Communist by the Nazis. The novel has been translated by Haakon Chevalier, and will be published next month by Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, Inc.

KERKER QUINN is an editor of *Direction* and one of the contributors to *Trial Balances,* an anthology of younger poets. He lives in Urbana, Ill.

NEWTON ARVIN was recently awarded a Guggenheim fellowship to write a book on Walt Whitman.

WALDO FRANK is chairman of the League of American Writers. He is now at work on a new novel.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD's latest book of verse is entitled *Not Mine to Finish.*

BEN FIELD is the instructor of the short story class in the John Reed Writers School, which is held under the auspices of PARTISAN REVIEW AND ANVIL. His stories have appeared frequently in earlier issues of the magazine.

JOSEPH FREEMAN'S forthcoming book, *An American Testament,* a narrative of ideas and personalities in relation to the revolutionary movement, will be published in the spring by Farrar and Rinehart.

SAUL LEVITT has contributed stories to the *New Masses, The Magazine, The Anvil, The American Mercury,* and other periodicals. He is now completing his first novel.

CLARA WEATHERWAX'S *Marching! Marching!* published last month, won the prize in the *New Masses* and John Day Co. contest for the best proletarian novel. It was also a Book Union choice. She lives in Los Angeles, Calif.

JAMES T. FARRELL and KENNETH FEARING will cover the theatre and the movies every month for PARTISAN REVIEW AND ANVIL.

Due to the large number of contributions received for this first issue, the entire book review section had to be eliminated. However, these reviews—by JACK CONROY, OBED BROOKS, RUTH LECHLITNER, EDWIN BERRY BURGUM, DAVID RAMSEY, and EDWIN SEAVER—will be published next month.

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Partisan Review & Anvil

FEBRUARY 1936

Grade Crossing

JOHN DOS PASSOS

"COME ON GIRLY we're goin' for a ride, get some air." Before she could protest he'd dragged her out to the parking lot. "Oh, but I don't think we ought to leave the others," she kept saying. "They're too goddam drunk to know. I'll bring you back in five minutes. A little air does a little girl good especially a pretty little girl like you."

The gears shrieked because he didn't have the clutch shoved in. The car stalled; he started the motor again and immediately went into high. The motor knocked for a minute but began to gather speed. "See," he said, "not a bad little bus." As he drove he talked out of the corner of his mouth to Eileen. "That's the last time I go into that dump. . . . Those little cracker politicians fresh out of the turpentine camps can't get fresh with me. I can buy and sell 'em too easy, like buyin' a bag of peanuts. That bastard I'll buy and sell him yet. You don't know who he is but all you need to know is he's a crook, one of the biggest crooks in the country, an' he thought, the whole damn lot of 'em thought they'd put me out on my ass. I can outsmart 'em at their own game, see. Administration'll give me a big job any day. They told me as much in Washington. Can get a job anywhere. I don't mean a job . . . jobs are things of the past. I mean an appointment. My name would be an asset to any Administration."

"Oh it's cold," moaned Eileen. "Let's go back. I'm shivering." Charley leaned over and put his arm round her shoulders. As he turned the car gave a great swerve. He wrenched it back onto the concrete road again. "Oh please do be careful Mr. Anderson . . . you're doing eighty-five now. . . . Oh don't scare me please."

Charley laughed. "My what a sweet little girl, look we're down to forty, just bowlin' pleasantly along at forty. Now we'll turn and go back . . . time little chickens were in bed. Never be scared in a car when I'm driving. If there's one thing I can do it's drive a car. But I don't like to drive a car. Now if I had my own ship here. It's a bran' new Boeing . . . a real yacht. . . . How would you like to take a nice spin in a plane? Nothin' in drivin' a car."

When they turned to run back towards Miami they saw the long streak of the dawn behind the broad barrens dotted with dead pines and halfbuilt stucco houses and closed servicestations and dogstands.

"Now the wind's behind us. We'll have you back to a threepoint landin' before you can say Jack Robinson." They were running along beside a railroad track. They were catching up on two red lights. "I wonder if that's the New York train." They were catching up on it, past the lighted observation car, past the sleepers with no light except through the groundglass windows of the dressingrooms at the ends of the cars. They were creeping up on the baggage car and mailcars and on the engine, very huge and tall and black, flicked with a little curling shine from Charley's headlights in the dark. The train had cut off the red streak of the dawn. "Hell they don't make any speed." As they passed the cab the whistle blew. "Hell I can beat him to the crossin'." The lights of the crossing were ahead of them and the long beam of the engine's headlights, that made the red and yellow streak of the dawn edging the clouds very pale and far away. The bar was down at the crossing. Charley stepped on the gas. They crashed through the bar, shattering their headlights. The car swerved around sideways. Their eyes were full of the glare of the locomotive headlight. "We're through," Charley yelled at the girl. "I can. . . ." The car swerved around on the tracks and stalled. He was jabbing at the starter with his foot. The crash wasn't anything.

When he came to he knew right away he was in a hospital. First thing he began wondering if he was going to have a hangover. He couldn't move. Everything was dark. From way down in a pit he could see the ceiling. Then he could see the peak of a nurse's cap and a nurse leaning over him. All the time he was talking. He couldn't stop talking.

"Well I thought we were done for. Say nurse where did we crack up? Was it at the airport? I'd feel better if I could remember what happened. It was this way nurse. I'd taken that little girl up to let her get the feel of that Boeing ship. I was sore as hell at somebody, must have been my wife, poor old Doris, did she give me a dirty deal? They are all alike those rich bitches. But now after this airport deal I'll be buyin' and sellin' the whole bunch of them. Say nurse what happened? Was it at the airport?"

The nurse's face and her hair were yellow under the white cap. She had a thin lipless face and thin hands that went past his eyes to smooth the cover under his chin.

"You must try and rest," she said. "Or else I'll have to give you another hypodermic."

"Say nurse are you a Canadian? I bet you're a Canadian."

"No I'm from Tennessee. . . . Why?"

"My mistake. You see always when I've been in a hospital the nurses have been Canadians. Isn't it kinder dark in here? I wish I could tell you how it happened.

"I'm the night nurse. It isn't day yet. You try and get some sleep."

"I guess they've called up the office. I'd like Staunch to take a look at the ship before anything's touched. Funny, nurse, I don't feel much pain, but I feel so terrible."

"That's just the hypodermics," said the nurse's brisk low voice. "Now you rest quietly and in the morning you'll wake up feeling a whole lot better."

"Check."

He couldn't stop talking: "You see it was this way. I had some sort of a wrangle with a guy. Are you listenin' nurse? I guess I've got kind of a chip on my shoulder since they

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been gangin' up on me so. In the old days I used to think everybody was a friend of mine, see. Now I know they're all crooks . . . even Gladys, she turned out the worst crook of the lot . . ."

The nurse was standing over him again. "I'm afraid we'll have to give you a little of the sleepy stuff brother. . . . Now just relax, relax. Think of somethin' nice. That's a good boy."

He felt her dabbing at his arm. He felt the prick of the needle. The hard bed where he lay awake crumbled gradually under him. He was sinking, without any sweetness of sleep coming on, he was sinking into dark again.

This time it was a stout starched woman standing over him. It was day. The shadows were different. She was poking some papers under his nose. She had a hard cheerful voice. "Goodmorning Mr. Anderson, is there anything I can do for you?"

Charley was still down in a deep well. The room, the nurses, the papers were far away above him somewhere. All round his eyes was stinging hot.

"Say I don't feel as if I was all there, Nurse."

"I'm the superintendent. There are a few formalities if you don't mind . . . if you feel well enough."

"Did you ever feel like it had all happened before. . . . Say where? I mean what town. . . ? Never mind don't tell me, I remember it all now."

"I'm the superintendent. If you don't mind the office would like a check for your first week in advance, and then there are some other fees."

"Don't worry. It's not a question of money."

"It's just the regulations."

"There must be a check book in my coat somewhere. Or get hold of my secretary. . . . He can make out a check for you."

"Now don't you bother about anything, Mr. Anderson. The office has made out a blank check. I'll fill in the name of the bank. You sign it. That will be two hundred and fifty dollars on account."

"Bankers' Trust, New York. . . . Gosh I can just about sign my name."

"The questionnaire we'll get the nurse to fill out later . . . for our records. . . . Well goodby, Mr. Anderson, I hope you have a very pleasant stay with us and wishing you a quick recovery." The stout starched woman had gone.

"Hey, Nurse," called Charley. "He suddenly felt scared. "What is this dump anyway? Where am I? Say Nurse, Nurse." He shouted as loud as he could. The sweat broke out all over his face and neck and ran into his ears and eyes.

A new pretty pink nurse was leaning over him. "What can I do for you, mister?" She wiped his face and showed him where the bell was hanging just by his hand. "Nurse I'm terribly thirsty," he said in a weak voice. "I thought for a minute I'd gotten in a clip joint."

"Now you must just rinse out your mouth. The doctor doesn't want you to eat or drink anything until he's taken his X-ray."

"Where is this doctor. . . . Why isn't he here now? Why hasn't he been here right along?

"Here's Dr. Snyder right now," said the nurse in an awed whisper.

"Well Anderson, you surely had a narrow squeak. You probably thought you were in a plane all the time. . . . Funny I've never known an airplane pilot yet who could drive a car. My name's Snyder. Dr. Ridgely Snyder of New York. Dr. Booth the house physician here has called me in as a consultant. It's possible we may have to patch up your inside a little. You see when they picked you up, as I understand it, a good deal of the car was lying across your middle. . . . A very lucky break that it didn't finish you right there. . . . You understand me don't you?"

Dr. Snyder was a big man with flat, close-shaven cheeks and square hands ending in square nails. A tag from a song old man Vogel used to sing ran across Charley's faint mind as he looked at the doctor standing there big and square and paunchy in his white clothes.

"That was Kaiser William's brother came to town,
He looked like William Kaiser the butcher
But they don't know each other."

"I guess it's the dope but my mind don't work very good. . . . You do the best you can, Doc. . . . and don't spare any expense. I just fixed up a little deal that'll make their ears ring. . . . Say Doctor what about that little girl. Wasn't there a little girl in the car?"

"Oh don't worry about her. She's fine, she was thrown absolutely clear. A slight concussion, a few contusions, she's coming along splendidly."

"First we'll take some X-rays. Now I don't want you to have anything on your mind, Mr. Anderson. . . . It'll just be a stitch here and a stitch there . . . we'll see what we can do. This was supposed to be my vacation but of course I'm glad to take such an interesting case . . . a man of such prominence."

"Well thank you Doc, for whatever you can do. . . . I guess I ought not to drink so much. . . . It's funny when I first came to in here I thought I was in another of them clip joints. Now Doris she wouldn't a liked me to talk like that, you know bad grammar, conduct unbecomin' an officer and a gentleman. . . . She's a bitch, to hell wid her. . . . But you know Doc when you get so you can buy 'em and sell 'em like an old bag of peanuts, a bag of stale goobers, you don't care what they think. You know Doc it may be a great thing for me bein' laid up, give me a chance to lay off the liquor, think about things. . . . Ever thought about things Doc?"

"What I'm thinking right now, Mr. Anderson, is that I'd like you to be absolutely quiet."

"All right you do your stuff Doc . . . you send that pretty nurse in an' lemme talk to her. I want to talk about old Bill Cermak. . . . He was the only straight guy I ever knew, him and Joe Askew. . . . I wonder how he felt when he died. . . . You see the last time I was—well, call it constitutionally damaged . . . him and me smashed up in a plane . . . the new mosquito . . . there's millions in it now but the bastards got the stock away from me. . . . Say Doc I don't suppose you ever died did you?"

There was nothing but the white ceiling above him, brighter where the light came from the window. Charley remembered the bell by his hand. He rang and rang it. Nobody came. Then he yanked at it until he felt the cord pull out somewhere. The pretty pink nurse's face bloomed above

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his like a closeup in a movie. She had a young rarely kissed new pink look. Her mouth was moving. He could see it making clucking noises, but a noise like long distance in his ears kept him from hearing what she said. It was only when he was talking he didn't feel scared. "Look here young woman . . .", he could hear himself talking. He was enjoying hearing himself talking. "I'm payin' my bills in this hospital and I'm goin' to have everythin' just how I want it. What's the use of havin' the dough if I can't have everythin' just exactly the way I want it. . . . I want you to sit here an' listen while I talk, see. Let's see what was I tellin' that bird about? He may be a doctor but he looks like William Kaiser the butcher to me.

"There's somebody to see you Mr. Anderson. Would you like me to freshen your face up a little?"

"What's her name? . . . Be sure to ask her name."

Charley turned his eyes. The screen had been pushed open. In the grey oblong of the door there was Margo. She was in green. She was looking at him with eyes round as a bird's.

"You're not mad, Margery, are you?"

"I'm worse than mad, I'm worried . . . you poor unfortunate son of a bitch."

"Everythin's goin' to be oke, Margo. I got a swell sawbones from New York. He'll patch me up. He looks like William Kaiser the butcher all except the mustaches . . . what do you know about that I forgot the mustaches. . . . Gosh you look shot, kid. . . . Don't look at me funny like that. I'm all right, see. I just feel better if I talk, see.

"Say Charley are you well enough to write out a check? I've got to have some jack. You know you were goin' to give me a commission on that airport deal. And I've got to hire a lawyer for you. That county attorney's sworn out a warrant. I brought your New York check-book."

"He can't do anythin' . . . the girl's all right ain't she? Jesus Margo I may have made a certain amount of jack but I'm not the Bank of England."

"Maybe your memory's gettin' short, but you said you'd open an account for me for ten grand." Her face was all hard lines under the makeup.

"Gimme a chance to get out of the hospital. . . . Don't let this get you Margo. I'm afraid you're lettin' it get you."

"Charley, you poor unfortunate bastard . . . you don't think it's any fun for me to worry you at a time like this . . . but I've got to eat like other people . . . an' if I had some jack I could fix that county attorney up . . . and keep the stuff out of the papers and everything. You know the kind of story they'll make out of it . . . but I got to have money quick."

"All right, make out a check for five thousand. . . . Damn lucky for you I didn't break my arm."

The pretty pink nurse had come back. Her voice was cold and sharp and icy. "I'm afraid it's time," she said.

Margo leaned over and kissed him on the forehead. Charley felt like he was in a glass case. There was the touch of her lips, the smell of her dress, her hair, the perfume she used, but he couldn't feel them. Like a scene in a movie he watched her walk out, the sway of her hips under the tight green dress, the little nervous way she was fluttering the check under her chin to dry the ink on it.

"Say Nurse it's like a run on a bank. . . . I guess they think the old institution's not so sound as it might be. . . . I'm givin' orders now see, tell 'em down at the desk, no more visitors, see? You and me an' Dr. Kaiser William there that's enough see. . . . The Bank of England wants a little quiet, see?"

"Anyway now it's time for a little X-ray," said the pretty pink nurse, in a cheerful voice as if it were a show or a baseball game they were going to. "First we'll rinse your mouth out."

An orderly came in. The room started moving away from the cot, a grey corridor was moving along, but the moving made blind spasms of pain rush up through him from his legs. He sank into sour puking blackness again. When it was light again it was very far away. A sort of reddish mist was over everything. He was talking but way off somewhere. He could feel the talk coming out of his throat but he couldn't hear it. What he heard was the doctor's voice saying *peritonitis* like it was the finest party in the world, like you'd say *baseball game*. There were other voices. His eyes were open, there were other voices. He must be delirious. There was Jim sitting there with a puzzled sour gloomy look on his face like he used to see him when he was a kid on Sunday afternoons going over his books.

"That you Jim? How the hell did you get here?"

"We flew," answered Jim. It was a surprise to Charley that people could hear him, his voice was so far away. "Everything's all right Charley. . . . You mustn't exert yourself in the least way. I'll attend to everything."

"Can you hear me, Jim? It's like a bum long distance phone connection."

"That's all right Charley. . . . We'll take charge of everything. You just rest quiet. Say, Charley, just as a precaution I want to ask you did you make a will?"

"Say was it *peritonitis* I heard somebody say? That's bad ain't it?"

Jim's long horse face was white. "It's . . . it's just a little operation. I thought maybe you'd better give me a power of attorney superseding all others, so that you won't have anything on your mind, see. I have it all made out, and I have Judge Grey here as a witness and Hedwig'll come in a minute. . . . Tell me are you married to this woman?"

"Me married? After Doris? Never again. . . . Good old Jim always wantin' people to sign things. Too bad I didn't break my arm. Well what do you think about planes now, Jim? Not practical yet . . . eh? But practical enough to make more money than you ever made sellin' tin lizzies. . . . Don't get sore Jim. . . . Say Jim be sure to get plenty good doctors. . . . I'm pretty sick do you know it? . . . It makes you so hoarse. . . . Don't do to save on the doctors. . . . I want to talk like we used to when you know up the Red River fishin' when there wasn't any. . . . I feel like I was passin' out again. Make that doctor give me somethin'. That was a shot. Thank you, nurse, made me feel fine, clears everything up. I tell you Jim things are hummin' in the air . . . mail subsidies, airports . . . all these new airliners . . . we'll be in on the ground floor on all that. . . . They thought they had me out on my ass but I fooled 'em. . . . Jesus Jim I wish I could stop talkin' and go to sleep. But this passin' out's not like sleep it's like . . . somethin' you don't come out of."

He had to keep talking but it wasn't any use. He was too hoarse for them to hear. He was dropping spinning being sucked down into. . . .

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The Truth about the Brazilian Revolution

PEREDA VALDES

BACKGROUND

THE recent revolution in Brazil, the scope and significance of which it is my purpose to set forth here, was not an isolated or sporadic phenomenon, but had a very direct relation to economic factors and to the existing political situation in that country.

Up to the middle of last year, there were in Brazil two great political parties, between which the public opinion of the nation was divided. There was the *Alliança Nacional Libertadora* (League for National Freedom) which, with an anti-fascist, anti-imperialist program, had the strong support of the old-time revolutionary elements, including soldiers, intellectuals and students' and workers' organizations; and there was the A.I.B., or *Acçao Integralista Brazileira* (Brazilian Integralist Movement) with a program that was definitely fascist, being modeled after those of the parties now in power in Italy and Germany. This latter party had the strong backing of the entire conservative class.

Alarmed by the rapid growth of the "League," and in reality under pressure brought to bear by the imperialist interests in the neighborhood of the embassies, which saw in such a manifestation a serious menace to their own economic-financial well-being, the federal government then ordered the *Alliança* dissolved; but all the while, the "Integralists" or fascists openly kept up their activities, despite the protests of the congress, the press and the courts of the land.

As a result, popular discontent continued to increase; for the majority of the people were "pro-League"; and demonstrations became more violent and more frequent in the north of Brazil, where the aboriginal element predominates. In Rio Grande do Norte political unrest was even more pronounced, owing to the fact that Sr. Rafael Fernandez, large property owner and well-known Integralist, had just been made governor of the state, although the people's choice was Commandant Hercolino Cascardo, an officer of the marine, a former revolutionist and erstwhile state comptroller, who in the course of his administration had displayed socialistic leanings and who was the acting president of the League.

From the economic and social point of view, it may be stated that the population of northeastern Brazil has for generations suffered from the exploitation of the feudal and imperialistic overlords. They have suffered and died from hunger, from thirst and from epidemics. Even water is sold or denied to the poor in times of drought, when the feudal masters summarily cut off or restrict the supply for the poor peasants, who come for miles and miles in search of the precious liquid. The regional literature contains numerous passages brilliantly descriptive of such sufferings, as in the *Bagaceira* ("The Husks") of José Américo and the *O Quinze* ("The Fifteenth") of Rachel de Queiroz.

The chief exploiters of the northeastern region are the Great Western Company—under cover of which British imperialism maintains a hateful monopoly of the railroads in the states of Alagoas, Pernambuco, Paraiba and Rio Grande do Norte—the saltpeter mines of the last-named state and the sugar factories throughout the district. Much has already been told of the starvation wages paid and the truly feudal state of slavery in which the people here live, a prey to hunger, thirst, disease and ill-treatment; so that there is no point in repeating all this. It may merely be remarked in passing that this exploitation not only goes on under the government's very eyes, but it actually has the support of the federal and state authorities, for the simple reason that governmental posts are for the most part filled by large shareholders in the enterprises involved, when not by the feudal land barons or the factory or mine heads themselves.

SUMMARY OF WHAT HAPPENED

With on the one hand, wages slashed and workers being laid off by the wholesale and subjected to persecution by the police, and on the other hand, the consciousness of the masses newly awakened by the League for National Freedom, the railway men, along with the workers in the salt mines of Macau and Arena Blanca, finally went out on strike. They were forthwith clubbed and thrown into jail—on the orders of the English or nationalistic bosses—that is all there is to it. The workers on the large plantations thereupon made common cause with the Great Western strikers and the miners, and a general strike was declared throughout the state. The masses were now stirred up and were beginning to arm themselves and to organize, in self-protection against police violence and in order to obtain their rights. When the British company, supported by the government, endeavored to resume railway traffic, women and children, mothers with babes at their bosoms, ran out and threw themselves on the rails, at the risk of their lives. In the meanwhile, inscriptions were to be seen in streets and buildings, on walls and along the highways, voicing the people's protest: "Down with the Great Western!" "Down with feudal and imperialist exploitation!" "Nationalize the imperialist plants!" "We want a popular, national, revolutionary government!"

Similar conditions prevailed in the streets of Recife and throughout the interior of the state of Pernambuco, the public's resentment being increased by the system of governing bodies which the Integralists ultimately proposed setting up, especially in the northern states, with the unmistakable silent consent and even with the scandalously open protection of the federal and various state governments. The short of the matter is, the government itself appeared to be doing everything in its power to bring matters to a head.

WHAT HAPPENED IN RIO GRANDE DO NORTE

The situation had reached this grave point and insurrection was in the air, both in the city and country districts,

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when Governor Rafael Fernandez, the big estate-owner who has been mentioned above, prevailed upon the central government to call out the federal troops against the rebels. Infantry Battalion No. 21, with headquarters at Natal, was accordingly given orders to proceed against the people, for the defense and preservation of the imperialist mines and factories; and their orders further were to put down the strike, which, in the euphemistic idiom that imperialists speak, is what is known as "preserving law and order and a respect for the constituted authorities." The Natal infantrymen declined to play the part of slave-hunters; and remembering how nobly, four years before, they had fallen in beside the rebels of Recife, they now refused to track down the victims of exploitation and oppression in Rio Grande do Norte.

On the 23rd of November the region is in a state of armed insurrection. Through the combined efforts of the soldiers, workers, peasants and popular sympathizers, the struggle against feudal-imperialist reaction has been victorious all through the state. Sr. Fernandez relinquishes the government; and the revolutionists, with the situation in hand, proceed to organize a new government, or rather a governing Junta, constituted as follows:

Sr. Mauro Lago, ex-state-prison-superintendent;

Sr. José de Macedo, another former public official;

Dr. Juan Batista Galvao, a professor and ex-secretary of the Athenæum at Natal:

Sr. Mario Paiva, a popular representative;

Sergeant Ezequiel Diniz, of the 21st Infantry Battalion.

All of these persons were well known and highly esteemed citizens of Natal. Things went on like this for three days, at the end of which time the revolutionists were forced to abandon the city in the face of advancing columns of soldiery, some of them leaving on board the Brazilian Lloyd steamer, *Santos,* while others made for the interior. A few days later, the *Santos* came back and put in at the port of Natal, having disembarked the revolutionists at an unknown point along the coast. As to just what the fate of the rebels was, the government to this day refuses to give out any information; but in the meanwhile, reports deserving of credence indicate that the insurrectionaries continued the struggle in the northeast, in the interior of the region.

From the list above given, it may be seen that the governing Junta was hardly one made up of "soldiers, marines, workers and peasants." Nonetheless, according to the official propaganda of Dr. Vargas's government, which is at present the only propaganda permitted in Brazil, the whole thing was due to a "communist plot." The Natal "soviet" was in all probability one composed of outlaws, acting under the instigation of a dangerous bearded Russian. But the truth will out, sooner or later, the censorship is bound to slip, and whether or no, we catch an allusion to the Junta. Then it's the "soviet" once more.

Needless to say, if the Junta had been composed of a degenerated admiral, an alcoholic general and one or more public embezzlers, whether bankers, manufacturers or land barons, the "plot" would have taken on quite another aspect. It would have been, for example, a "national safety movement," and would have begun by protecting the imperialist plants and by jailing or shooting down—as in Rio Grande do Sul, in 1930, and in San Paulo, in 1932—all those who declined to take part in the bosses' "fight," and who thereby showed themselves to be communists, plain and simple.

But as it happens, the Junta was composed of men of the people, even though they might belong to the middle class; and this body at once called for an unremitting struggle against imperialist exploitation and for the nationalization of mines and factories. It spoke sometimes in the name of the League for National Freedom; and again, it would invoke the name of Luis Carlos Prestes, the hoped-for leader, so long dreamed of in Brazil. For all of that, it wasn't a governing Junta; a "soviet" it had to be! It was not the long-awaited movement for national liberation in Brazil, but a conspiracy on the part of "extremist elements."

The short of it is, the story must be told in some other way, and I am not the one to tell it. Let us go on to something else.

THE REVOLUTION IN PERNAMBUCO AND RIO DE JANEIRO

Curiously enough—a fact only to be explained by a lack of organization in the midst of swift-crowding events—curiously enough, the city of Recife, the most revolutionary of any in Brazil, did not respond as had been expected. In Pernambuco, the armed uprising did not take on the importance that it did in Rio Grande do Norte. The workers, however, did take possession of the outlying suburbs, where they were dislodged by reinforced detachments of troops loyal to the government. In Rio de Janeiro, on the contrary, there were important developments. Captain Agildo Barata, one of the indubitable leaders of the revolution, was stationed at the time in the 30th Infantry barracks, in Praia Vermelha; and there he started a movement in the ranks, obtaining the support of more than a hundred corporals and sergeants and one commissioned officer. On the night of Tuesday, November 26, as the officers were all upstairs in their clubroom, which was on the third floor, Captain Barata, having strategically distributed his forces, dashed up to the salon, where he suddenly burst in, cheering for the revolution and for Luis Carlos Prestes. A colonel started reproving him for his conduct and ordered him downstairs at once to his quarters.

"Who are you?" said Barata.

"I'm your commanding officer," said the colonel.

"I don't know you! The only commanding officer I recognize is Luis Carlos Prestes!"

With this, he drew his revolver and shouted at them: "Up with your hands!" The hands went up, one hundred and fifteen pairs of them. Barata then placed a sentinel over the officers with orders to shoot the first one who made a move. Going down to the second floor, he threatened to blow the place to bits if any of the seven hundred and fifty men there dared to stir. The mutineers were barely a hundred in number, but they now engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the other soldiers. The result was, the regiment was prevented from answering the government's call to arms, which was Barata's object all along.

The revolutionary summons was responded to by the Military Aviation School. Whether it was that they were

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more liberty-loving by temperament or more noble-minded, or whether it was the warm personal feeling they had always had for Prestes, the aviators enthusiastically answered the call which was echoing from all sides. Not being able to get their planes out, they destroyed more than eighty of them. A bloody fray ensued, in which Captain Barata took a prominent part, while among those slain on the government side was Lieutenant Braganca.

PERSONAGES OF THE REVOLUTION

The outstanding figure in all Brazil is, it would seem, Luis Carlos Prestes, the man of mystery, who is the source of so much dread and uneasiness to Dr. Vargas's government. He has always been a meteoric character for the Brazilians, meteoric and mystery-shrouded, a famous northern crusader for freedom. He is the long-hoped-for, the Knight of Good Hope, as he is known, who with the aid of the uprising Brazilian masses is to bring a liberation at last from the imperialist yoke.

Another leader of great influence is Lieutenant Silo Meirelles, who has been a revolutionist since 1922. He was in prison for many years. He is an intellectual, a writer and a brilliant journalist. Noted for his courage and big-heartedness, he is greatly beloved of the Brazilian populace, which sees in him one of its most fervent defenders. For a long time he was in exile in Uruguay. He is the leader of the Pernambuco revolutionists, that being his native state. He has taken upon himself the legal responsibility for the movement there.

The brave Captain Barata is yet another. A revolutionist since 1930, he was staff officer and right-hand-man to Juarez Tavora, most of whose victories in the north were owing to him. In 1932, he was connected with the Constitutionalist uprising and was exiled to Europe. He is at the same time a good writer and journalist.

An official gazette affords the names of some of the persons who, as the government puts it, were arrested for being implicated in the "communist plot" and for "taking orders from Moscow":

Gilberto Freire, former secretary of state of Pernambuco and a professor in the University of Rio de Janeiro, one of Brazil's most famous writers; Dr. Daniel Rabelo, head of the medical school of Bello Horizonte; Vicente Garcia, head of the Central Railroad of Brazil; Dr. Pedro da Cunha, Socialist Party leader; Professor Hermes Lima; Rodolfo Carvalho, editor of *O Radical;* Anisio Amaral, head of the Workers Book Union; Judge Baixa Verde; Anisio Teixeira, superintendent of public instruction in Rio de Janeiro; Dr. Dionelio Nachado, noted physician of Rio Grande do Sul; etc.

The names, as will be seen, are distinguished ones, representing important positions, and this will give an idea of the extent to which the movement had spread through all classes of the population, among those supposed to be involved being state employes, university professors, intellectuals, workers, soldiers, students, etc., etc. The truth is, the best minds of Brazil were back of the League for National Freedom.

The reaction on the part of the anti-popular, imperialistic government of Dr. Getulio Vargas has been far-reaching and is at present being felt in all quarters. More than five thousand persons have been thrown into noisome jail cells; the prisons are packed to overflowing. Not only public functionaries and intellectuals, but even ladies from the upper strata of Rio society have been herded into the prison-pens of Brazil's dictator, the man whom the people loathe.

INTERVIEW WITH AN EXILE

By way of lending confirmation to these notes, I have interviewed a political exile from Brazil who put in at Buenos Aires aboard a boat.

"Were you in Brazil at the outbreak of the revolution?"

"Yes, I was in Rio de Janeiro on November 23rd. The first news, or rather, the only news the public received was that which came from official sources, for the government is in control of communications. But of course, something had leaked through before the censorship was clamped down."

"Well, what did the official reports say?"

"According to the information we got, it was a mutiny in the battalions stationed at Natal and Recife; some of the soldiers had joined with communist workers of Natal, and many persons had been killed and there had been much disorder. It seemed that, at Natal, they had organized a communist government, a 'soviet', and that this was part of a widespread plot to massacre all the public authorities, the priests, etc. From the beginning, the official, fascist press insisted that the 'plot' had been nipped in the bud, the revolt put down and that the majority of the local authorities were with the government."

"What was the truth of the matter?"

"From such news as managed to get by the censor, we were aware that the uprising had been brought on by the growing discontent among the masses, by the measures of repression which the fascist governor, Fernandez, in company with a handful of Integralists in Rio Grande do Norte, had taken, and by the destitution which prevailed among the state employes. The people wanted Cascardo for governor—Herculino Cascardo, ex-comptroller and present head of the League for National Freedom. In the course of his previous administration, Cascardo had adopted certain measures of a collectivist nature which had made a good impression and had won for him a personal following. As more and more were cast into prison, the strike against the Great Western and other companies spread and became an insurrection; and the troops which were sent to put down the rebellion went over to the people's side. There was, to tell the truth, no rioting, no rebellion, but soldiers and the people were on the best possible terms.—In addition to these factors, there was the indignation provoked by the dissolution of the League and the governmental support that was given to 'Integralism'."

"And what happened in Rio?"

"In Rio, too, there was great indignation, and this was felt in the barracks; for Prestes is very popular in military circles. On the walls of the barracks, you could see inscriptions: 'Prestes is our general.' This alone should give you an idea of how serious the situation was. The other circumstances were as you have set them forth in your article."

Translated from the Spanish by Samuel Putnam

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To the Left: To the Subsoil*

CARL VAN DOREN

MUCH of the best American literature has always inclined toward the left. This is something we sometimes forget. Reading older American writers now, we fail to realize how often they were logically or emotionally revolutionary in their times. For that matter, the most conservative organization in the United States calls itself the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Emerson was in a true sense revolutionary, and on almost every point of opinion he went creatively beyond what most of his contemporaries believed in: in theology and in philosophy, and as to the whole end and meaning of American life. Thoreau was an anarchist. He insisted on not being drawn into the numbing influence of cheerful, thoughtless majorities. He proposed to live in his own way and so find out what life at large was about. Whitman, taking liberty and equality for granted, made himself the prophet and poet of fraternity, which he thought the earlier revolution had not sufficiently achieved. Mark Twain, raising the old tall stories of the West to a form of literary art, grew more and more passionate in his feeling against imperialism, war, dictatorships, greed, baseness, complacency. He was the first of our realists who greatly enlarged the number of subjects with which American literature might deal.

This enlarging process has continued increasingly in the present century. Theodore Dreiser reached down for his subject to a neglected subsoil of American life. All literature is like agriculture in that it constantly looks for ways of getting at the subsoil from which strength comes. Dreiser realized that there was a whole world of men and women who had never been written about. Before Dreiser the lives of such people had not been thought proper subjects for fiction in America. Dreiser made it plain that there is no subject which is not proper for fiction. What matters is the mastery a writer has over his subject and the power he has to make it real or revealing to his readers.

Writers like Edgar Lee Masters and Sinclair Lewis, during the war and just after it, again did something new and, in a literary sense, revolutionary. Masters set a whole school of writers to work proving that the old-fashioned American village was not, as it had been usually represented, merely simple and charming. What Masters did in verse Sinclair Lewis did in prose. They both dug into the basic common life of the United States and reinterpreted it.

In our own time, particularly since the cataclysm of 1929, this process has been steadily extended. Poets, playwrights and novelists go on reaching to the American subsoil for materials for American literature. They concern themselves with the lives of men working in factories and mines, with starving and drifting sharecroppers, with the dispossessed, the underprivileged, the unemployed. It is hard to remember how little attention had been paid to this large part of the American population by American writers before the past half dozen years. If it had not been for the depression, possibly Darkest America might have been overlooked by literature. But it has grown until it can not be overlooked. Consequently writers of generous emotions, of quick and lively sympathies, have turned to it for their materials, and many of the best poems, plays and novels of the time deal with a powerful new theme.

The process is the process which has been going on in American literature from the beginning. I do not mean to deny originality to our newest literature. After all, literature is seldom very original, any more than life is. One baby is much like another. But babies keep on being born and becoming new creatures and leading new lives. So with books. The books which are most alive in our age are like the books which have been most alive in the past American ages. When they first appear they encounter resistance from readers. Readers have read other and older books and have accepted the other and older ideas and forms of expression. Such readers seem to think that in literature the last word has been said. The last word will never be said until some one says that human life has ended. Even then there will have to be somebody left to say it. And that somebody may change his mind. Since while life lasts no last words can be said, new words have to be spoken as new life rises to the consciousness of men.

* From an address delivered at a dinner given by the Book Union, new left-wing book club.

Where?

I'd like to go at least a thousand miles from here,
To New Orleans, to the South of France,
To Haiti, to Java, to Montevideo, to Waikiki,
To the night-islands lit by the Southern Cross,
Fanned by the Trades and owned by the Powers;
To any place where there's sun and wind and beaches,
To any city or coast or mountain or island,
Valley or plain where the class struggle doesn't
Tick out the long hours of the clock,
Where free breadfruit rolls onto the kitchen stove:
I'd like to find this place, I and the rest of us,
Where depressions don't play tag with war,
And champaigne cocktails come trickling down the rocks,
And the girls never think of your bank-account;
I'd like to go where no dog eats dog,
Where the big fish doesn't swallow the little fish,
Where you don't have to take it and smile,
And no one's work is bought or sold by any other man—
Take out the atlas, get the microscope; show me where.

JAMES NEUGASS

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In the Heart of Darkness

ANDRÉ MALRAUX

KASSNER opened his eyes.

There was nothing with a cutting edge. Neither a rope nor a handkerchief. Open his veins with his fingernails? He felt that these were not yet long enough.

Was there nothing else? A friend of his had asked that one of his veins be opened after his death, to be sure that circulation had ceased. Kassner remembered the assistant's scalpel (the doctor had refused) seeking the fine, white vein in flesh that no longer bled. Thus with his bloody fingertips he would seek one of his own full and throbbing veins, without seeing it.

His body, which had appeared to him so vulnerable, now lived with a dully invincible animation, his heart and respiration protected by its cage of bones. "Nature acts as though men were always anxious to commit suicide. . . . "

He felt a need both to die in peace and to sink his thumbs into the throat of the first guard who entered, without letting go, no matter what happened. . . . How could he make his death useful? In this hole, it was impossible to help anyone. "To have had so many opportunities to die. . . ." How badly fate chose. He would have to fall back on his fingernails.

It would not be so very simple. He went up to the streak of light that outlined the door and was able to make out his hand with its outspread fingers, its nails which felt very short. He would use the nail of his little finger like a vaccination needle. He tried to make it penetrate his flesh, at the wrist. In vain. It was too short, but also too round, too blunt: the flesh was both more elastic and harder than he thought. He would have to sharpen the nail by rubbing it against the wall. At least two more days.

He was still trying to see his fingers, whose tips barely emerged from the total darkness as though they had belonged to a strange hand. His courage had assumed the form of death. And he looked with fascination at that almost invisible flesh which was his and on which the nail which would enable him to kill himself was slowly to grow.

Once more he began to pace the floor. His hand which was becoming fate hung beside him like a satchel. The hour that was approaching would be the same as this; the thousand smothered sounds that teem like lice beneath the silence of the prison would repeat to infinity the pattern of their crushed life; and suffering, like dust, would cover with an even anguish the immutable domain of nothingness.

He leaned back against the wall and returned to the stagnant hours. . . .

The light came from a lamp at the end of the corridor. Outside it was night, no doubt.

The guard, standing with legs apart, was examining him. This fellow is looking for some fun, thought Kassner. He knew stories of prisoners who are made to walk on all fours.

The guard took a step forward.

Kassner felt certain that he was standing face to face with cruelty or the craving for humiliation, and yet he could barely make out anything of the man's features but the brutal expression into which they composed. He drew back a step to keep his distance, throwing his body forward and raising his left heel: if he speaks, he said to himself, I won't answer, but if he tries to touch me I'll ram my head into his belly. We'll see what happens after that.

The guard understood perfectly: in the recoil of fear the torso is held back, not forward. Something fell limply.

"Work. Unravel," he said. The door closed.

The very moment Kassner thought he was closest to suicide, reality had sufficed to give him back his strength. Before, when the SA-men had come into his cell, all fear—and his anguish—had left him, in spite of the screams from the neighboring cells, the moment they had entered. He knew the world of insomnia and had been haunted by sensations of distress inexhaustibly reiterated, with an insect's precision: this was the world in which he was now struggling, and the effectiveness of his efforts could not lie in achieving a calm which was obviously beyond his reach, but in the possibility of knowing that his head and his fists were there, ready to strike. And he had forgotten the sense of touch so completely that he would have struck as a hungry man eats.

He went over to the object that the guard had dropped, and picked it up: it was a piece of rope.

Could one not eat a rope, well broiled? A purple slice of roast meat, beads of water forming on the decanters, anise and mint sherbets in the evening by the trees! How many times had he been fed since he was here? Hunger threw him back into the brutish fever of violent aversions, but only for short moments. "Work. . . . "

It occurred to him that unraveling the rope would wear down his fingernails, as though suicide had returned to look for some object within him that it had forgotten. The metallic clicks of doors slammed shut followed one another in a rising scale in the dense, black silence: no doubt the guards were distributing rope. Did the suicidal urge enter with them into all these holes, at its appointed hour, the same for almost all, like despair and degradation, each coming at its appointed hour? Did not the waves of madness, which had left Kassner, drag his companions into their maelstrom, lower and lower, farther and farther from the men they were? Did they not grasp the rope, did they not become mad before that Nazi rope, on finding that their sole gesture of liberty had been foreseen, that they were robbed of their death, as they had been robbed of life? . . . There were those who had been longer in the cells than he had, and the very young and the sick. . . . In each cell there was a rope, and Kassner could do nothing more than to strike the wall.

Blow after blow. He hardly dared to listen. Yet either he had lost his mind, or something was answering. From the same direction as a while ago. While he listened with all his might, he was afraid to hear: would not those knocks cease once more? Once already he had thought he heard the

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guard's step, and he had been mistaken. Hope itself was a form of suffering.

Full of infinite patience, the patience of a prisoner, the invisible hand began again:

Five—two—two, six—nine—ten—one, four—one—four—two, six—nine.

Nine was separated from ten by a longer pause than two from six.

While he was knocking, Kassner had not sought the alphabet. That did not greatly matter, and the essential thing was that communication should be established: he was freeing his companion, he was freeing himself, from nothingness as effectively by listening as by knocking. The groups of two figures: two—six, one—four, no doubt did not belong to a system of dividing the alphabet, since they were followed by isolated figures. They almost surely indicated numbers. 5-2-26-9-10. He had already forgotten the others.

He knocked once more.

Once more the neighbor answered.

5-2-26; 9-10; 14-14; 26-9.

Over and over again he tapped out the numbers until Kassner had repeated them.

The latter was contracting the muscles round his eyes with all his might, till his temples ached, trying to visualize these figures in order. It was not in their names but in their signs that the key to their meaning lay. And he felt in himself the soul of a miserly insect that accumulates its wealth in its hollow in the stone, its legs folded—like his fingers against his chest at this moment—over these numbers, which the weakness or the over-excitement of his memory might blot out, like an awakening. Hanging by some imperceptible and precarious thread in back of his eyes, they nevertheless flooded the darkness, flowed over him as though he should have to hold on to them to save himself, and his hands were repeatedly missing them. He tried all the keys; a figure added to the number of letters of the alphabet, or else subtracted; multiplication; division of the alphabet into sections. Thinking, searching for figures, escaping the intolerable emptiness was such a relief that every obstacle, by comparison, seemed ridiculous. The alphabet read backwards? . . . He discovered that he only knew the alphabet by heart by reading it forward.

What if the man who was knocking was crazy?

He remembered a former anarchist comrade who, while lying sick in a military hospital, had persuaded several of those in the nearby beds to become conscientious objectors. He had been found out and afterwards moved to a bed between the wall and an insane man.

And why might not one of the guards be knocking meaninglessly, on purpose, in answer to his taps?

The knocks were beginning again. This blind, stubborn patience could only be that of a prisoner; and such care, such concentration on the manner of knocking could not be those of a lunatic.

By dint of patience he would find it! If he did not confuse the figures whose meaning he was seeking, through the successive guesses—to find himself at last stripped, naked, so near to this tireless brotherhood. . . .

And meanwhile every noise in the prison was becoming like a distant knock, and the entire prison like that night-meeting in Hamburg, where every man had struck a match at his request, and all had been able to gauge the size of the crowd by the myriad tiny flames that flickered for a moment in the night as far as the eye could reach. . . . He remembered a street in a workers' district near Alexanderplatz with its closed cigar-stores in the moonlight, on a night of battle. The communists had just left the street and the last lights were going out as the rumble of the police trucks was approaching. Scarcely had the latter roared past when from one end of the street to the other the windows hurled their rectangles of light gashed by silhouettes down on the sidewalks. Holding back a little because of the bullets, the street population had appeared all at once with its tense faces, the unbidden children a little lower. Doors opened for comrades who might have hidden in recesses. And then, as suddenly as it had appeared, this brotherly demonstration had returned to the night; a new police truck was arriving, which passed at full speed between the houses that had fallen back into the moonswept indifference.

Hours and hours, eaten away by the ant-like numbers with the occasional passing of the guards. And slowly, almost accidentally, as though it had taken shape within him of its own accord, the idea came to him that 5 might very well indicate, not that 1 was the fifth letter, but that it was after five letters that the alphabet began. F would then be 1; G, 2 . . . Z, 21; A, 23 . . . E, 26. Once more the other prisoner was knocking and Kassner listened, following the knocks one by one on his fingers and spelling:

2—G; 26—E; 9—N. G-E-N-O-S-S-E: Comrade.

Translated by Haakon Chevalier

Why the Druids All Died

It is a gray tree-trunk wilderness
Of men, sapless, almost barkless,
Duplicated in shifty shadows—
Perfect to totem-tattoo
With series of red white and blue
Pricks representing breeze-tossed flags
And if there's room a pair of elastic hips and legs.

These men, all but their eyes, seem dead.
When buying Boston for thirteen smackers
They must watch to get the right change back.
There is no substitute for a business head.

They are in no way exceptional: they hate hate,
Love love, fear fear, follow faith,
They are not articulate: *hello* to neighbors,
Yes to big-shots, echo to the morning-paper,
I'll never never again to priests, snorts to beggars,
They are not useful: loathe to begin,
Bungle the doing, stumble at ending.

When shall we uproot this deadwood, dynamite
The stumps, plant saplings on the site?
Reforesting is hard work, with distant gain,
But indispensable as April rain.

KERKER QUINN

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A Letter on Proletarian Literature

NEWTON ARVIN

To the Editors:

MY apologies to you; I find that, in the time limits you have set for me (generous as they are) I can't write a review of the proletarian anthology* that deserves the name of a review. At the best I don't believe anyone ever finds it easy to say something quickly and glibly about any book except a palpably trashy one; surely the most unassuming kind of criticism, like the more representational sorts of writing, calls for a certain interval between chewing and real assimilation; and the richer the feast, the more varied the courses, the truer this seems to be. This anthology is a big meal and an unusually hearty one, and for the moment you may be willing to excuse a reviewer for responding with hardly more than a deep belch of the sincerest approbation.

I say this with what may appear to be light-mindedness, but you probably realize that that is far from my intention. On the contrary, though I don't wish to sentimentalize, I suspect you agree with me that a reviewer's job, like any other writer's, is the more arduous the more his feelings are involved, the more his memories are stirred, and the more his hopes and fears are called into question. Well, those conditions could hardly be more fully met than when an American literary student, with a long anonymous petit-bourgeois background and leftward sympathies, is asked to comment on the proletarian anthology. It's far from being one more "publishing event" that he is required to say a word about. It's a many-voiced expression of the America of his own time; an expression of the near and tragic life of his own people, if not generally of his own class; of their failures, their bitterness, their anger, their resolution; their abortive past, their current ordeal, their potentially humane and communal future. These writers are not recording old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago: if they were, they would be relatively much easier to talk about in an academic and analytical manner, and the process of metabolism would be a shorter one. But the ravaged landscapes in these stories and poems are the ravaged landscapes of one's own childhood; the tortured cities are one's own cities; and the primeval brutalities, the hardly human (yet intensely human) sufferings these writers represent are the brutalities and sufferings one may have escaped literally but in no other sense.

All this, it seems to me obvious, makes the critic's job—part of which is to say what is all wool and what isn't—a good deal harder here than it sometimes is. Then, too, there is the more strictly literary trammel that somewhat clogs the free play of discrimination: I mean, the fact that all these writers are doing or trying to do what one has long hoped American writers would see it was their great chance to do; hoped it for a long time, even if *too* long in an ill-defined way. The Emerson who had called for an American bard of the type he described in "The Poet" could hardly have been coldly judicious when Whitman sent him a copy of *Leaves of Grass;* and, without suggesting any fatuous parallel, no one can at once be coldly judicious about a book like this who has ever hoped that American poets and prose writers would turn away from nostalgic escapades and barren satire to the dramatization of our own history as it is really making; the dramatization of life under capitalism in its ugly but grandiose decline. There can't be any doubt that this book announces unmistakably a new and, now, a healthy chapter in American literature at the same time that it shows how an old promise, an old potentiality present in our culture from the beginning, is going to be fulfilled and made a reality. So I say it is a little difficult to fiddle with the critical scales in the usual painstaking way.

The anthology is so full of hot life that I should think even the newspaper critics would have been uncomfortable in the same room with it. But I don't deny that if, even in the first enthusiasm of reading it, one glances from time to time at one's literary thermometer, one will appreciate that different degrees of creative heat and cold are achieved in it. This seems to be partly a matter of the mere form of expression; of the readiness with which certain forms lend themselves to the direct rendering of social observations and feelings, and the stiffer resistance of other forms. The pieces in the section on reportage, for example, are surely the most successful, on their own terms, of all the things in the book; so that it is hard to see how John Mullen's "Mushrooms in the Foundry," or Meridel Le Sueur's "I was Marching," or John Spivak's "Letter to President Roosevelt" could say what they aim to say any more brilliantly than they do. At the opposite pole, the critics give the strong impression of working in a medium that has not yet been made plastic to their new purposes; and the poets seem to have only fewer hurdles to get over. The critics come nearest to writing critical *literature* when, like Michael Gold in his classic tirade against Thornton Wilder, they let their analytical or judicial functions interfere least self-consciously with their perceptions and emotions; and of course that tirade never pretended to be criticism in its most finished form.

As for the poets, they seem to utter themselves most fully if not most interestingly when, like the reporters, they speak straight out of the daily struggle and content themselves with voicing it ingenuously and spontaneously; so that it is tempting, if not quite sincere, to say that the best of the poetry is in the pieces from Gellert's "Negro Songs," in Don West's unaffected stanzas, in H. H. Lewis's "I'll Say," or Langston Hughes's ballads. It wouldn't be either sincere or true to say this, for "naive" poetry—to use Schiller's distinction—is less expressive of the whole modern personality than "sentimental" poetry; and it would certainly be

* Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology. International Publishers.

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an inverted snobbishness to prefer "I'll Say", good as it is, to Kenneth Fearing's almost perfect "Lullaby," or to Edwin Rolfe's imperfect but very moving "Poem for May First," or to James Neugass's "Thalassa, Thalassa." Just the same, such poets as these, and Schneider, and Hayes, and Patchen, and several others whose gifts are unquestionable, still show signs of battling with obstacles to full expression that the reporters and the naive poets haven't needed to worry about.

It is of course—it must be—an endlessly difficult job for a revolutionary poet to avoid bareness, prosaic literalness and even doggerel, and at the same time to break away from the excessive indirectness and allusiveness of the poets who have just preceded him in American poetry. I can't honestly say that I think Stanley Burnshaw's "I, Jim Rogers" or Michael Gold's "Worker Correspondence" or Alfred Kreymborg's "American Jeremiad" succeeds in steering off the first rock, or that Muriel Rukeyser's "City of Monuments" or Robert Gessner's "Cross of Flame" wholly avoids the second. It is naturally an exacting matter of finding the images that will really transmit the whole emotion without either stepping it up artificially or short-circuiting it with an abortive flash. For whatever a mere list may be worth, I think the obstacles have been surprisingly overcome in the three poems I mentioned above; in Gold's "Strange Funeral," in Gregory's "Dempsey, Dempsey," in Kalar's "Papermill," in Patchen's "Joe Hill Listens to the Praying," in Schneider's fine "To the Museums," in Genevieve Taggard's "Life of the Mind, 1935," in David Wolff's "August 22, 1927," and in Richard Wright's "Between the World and Me."

Neither the writers of fiction nor the playwrights seem to face quite such stubborn artistic problems, and indeed when one sees or reads such pieces as *Waiting for Lefty* or the scenes from *Black Pit* and *Stevedore* one feels that the writers for the theatre have almost as genial a medium for proletarian writing as the reporters. They are forced back upon living speech and "real" action, of course, and when they have a prodigal endowment for the writing of dialogue, as Clifford Odets has, or a fine sense of what movement on the stage can be made to signify, as Peters and Sklar seem to have (I must judge from reading), or a rich and warm feeling for personality in moments of crisis, as both Albert Maltz's story ("Man on a Road") and the scene from *Black Pit* prove he has, they carry the reader away with them almost as irresistibly as the spectator. I don't include John Wexley's scene from *They Shall Not Die,* for the moment, for perhaps no good reason; my first thought is only that, strong as it is, it lacks the inevitable truth and eloquence of language, of speech, that carry conviction to the mere reader outside the theatre.

As for the fiction, it seems to me it would be critical pedantry to hem and haw very long over a selection that includes such sound and affecting pieces of writing as Robert Cantwell's "Hills around Centralia," Ben Field's "Cow," Halper's "Scab!" and the passages from *Jews without Money, The Disinherited, The Executioner Waits,* and *To Make My Bread.* Aside from *Jews Without Money,* which on its own premises left little to be desired, no one of these longer books embodies the utmost of which one hasn't the least doubt their authors are capable: it can't be pretended that there is yet an American *Germinal.* But these are the books that forecast its appearance with an almost scientific finality; and, though I myself should have preferred a passage from the earlier chapters of Grace Lumpkin's book, that is a small matter, and the point is that these books had to be represented somehow.

A Calvinistically conscientious reviewer might be easily embarrassed by the fact that there is no piece of fiction reprinted in this anthology which hasn't some force or sharpness of its own. But if I haven't spoken specifically of Farrell's "The Buddies," Tillie Lerner's "The Iron Throat," Edwin Seaver's "Aarons," or the passage from William Rollins's *The Shadow Before,* it is because I think Tillie Lerner's story and Rollins's novel have less sharpness than they ought to have, and Farrell's and Seaver's stories, less force. It *has* been a serious limitation of some proletarian writers of fiction, hitherto, that they have been either too much preoccupied with their materials or (possibly) in some cases too much cowed by the example of the hard-boiled writers, to let all the beauty or humor or cruelty of their human materials come out as freely and unreflectingly as they certainly might and should; they have been afraid of tenderness, or expansiveness, or the appropriate vehemence; and a good deal of proletarian fiction has been meagre, dry and toneless as a result. This particular story of Farrell's is a case in point, though *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* as a whole certainly isn't; and I am sorry not to know whether the whole of *The Company* is stylistically richer than the passage quoted here: this passage, for that matter, has a spare irony that needs no apology. Tillie Lerner's story and Rollins's novel have all the vehemence they can stand: what they have in lesser degree is simplicity and precision of form; the simplicity and precision that come from a full confidence in the material itself, a sense of how much can be done and how much can't, and a determination to be (at the end of the arduous process) utterly natural. Michael Gold, Robert Cantwell and Albert Maltz have shown that a proletarian writer can be free, warm, precise and natural at once: it can't be too much to ask!

I wish I could say that any of the criticism, or any criticism that has been written in a Marxist spirit here, is anything like so completely fledged as this; on the other hand, anyone who has tried to write in that spirit has a pretty good idea what the difficulties are, and is in a position to appreciate what these writers have accomplished. As I see it, one of the troubles is that too few of the critical writers on the left have quite realized what a rich and interesting form of expression criticism can be, or how truly it can give voice to just as many kinds of thought and feeling as, in a wholly dissimilar vein, poetry and fiction do. There is no reason under the sun why it has to be drily expository or prosaically analytical, or why it can only be written from the eyebrows up. Yet that is what too much of it is like. One can agree wholeheartedly with the point that Phillips and Rahv are making in their essay, and still wish that they could make it in a less scholastic manner. One can feel that what Granville Hicks has done, in the essay here reprinted and in so many other places, is simply invaluable to the American movement; and still wish that when he writes

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criticism he would let himself give vent to more of the energies in a remarkable temperament than he often does. Imagination, anger, the subtle sense of form, the historical fancy and plenty of other things have as legitimate a role in criticism as the practical will or the discursive intelligence has; and some of these things are really at work in Cowley's review of Paul Engle's book (which had to be brief and slight), in Obed Brooks's essay on MacLeish (which is still imperfectly clarified) and especially in Burgum's essay on the English radical poets.

One final point! All proletarian writers, I take it, are under a solemn obligation to fight tooth and nail against philistinism in all its nauseating forms; to rise above parochialism both of place and time; and to save from the black night of fascism all of the past that is really humane and of good report. Particularly the literary critics—if one *can* say "particularly" of any group—are bound by this obligation, whether they will or no. Particularly American critics are bound by the obligation to keep alive all that was creative and hopeful in their national past, and to reassert it to the everlasting and irredeemable discredit of all that was, and is, destructive and damnable. For this reason, I am sorry to see Bernard Smith, in an excellent essay on Huneker, which puts a whole group of writers straight in the place where they belong—I am sorry to see him remarking that "There were only respectable critics until the 1890's. 'Culture' was a possession of the provincial aristocracy." With the friendliest feeling in the world, I have to say that, in the words of Artemus Ward, these sentences are of the bosh boshy. To dispose of Channing or Margaret Fuller or Henry Clapp as "respectable" critics merely, is not to see things in their true light or as they really are. And if there were any more truly "cultured" men in mid-century America than the farmer's son, Theodore Parker, or the carpenter's son, Walt Whitman, I'd like to know who they were. Bernard Smith will forgive me for plain and perhaps over-emphatic speaking; but since the point has come up I must take issue also with his other phrase, "such national holy ones as Emerson and Longfellow." Longfellow was a really fine poet in a valid though far from a major mode; Baudelaire and Freiligrath would hardly have bothered to translate so much of him if he hadn't been; and he wrote both a fine anti-war poem and a stirring poem against slavery. But to speak of him in the same breath with Emerson as a national holy one is only to darken counsel. As well speak of Goethe and Tieck in the same breath! or Ruskin and Clough! or Renan and Sully-Prudhomme! I wish Bernard Smith would draw as sharp and as just a line between them as he draws between Huneker and Brooks.

But I must bring this far too long letter, this substitute for a real review, to an end. I'm sure there are plenty of questions—both of the strictly literary, even technical order and of the social or political—which more formal reviewers I hope will discuss. But meanwhile I'm particularly glad to have had an opportunity to say how unmistakably the anthology demonstrates that the new literary age of which Cowley has spoken is a plain and unavoidable reality. The journalistic and academic reviewers may seem to be avoiding it successfully, but that outfit could *seem* to avoid the crack of doom.

The Writer's Part in Communism

WALDO FRANK

[*An address to the International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, held at Paris, June* 21-25, 1935.]

WE ARE all here, not as Frenchmen, Germans, Americans, but as men of letters who conceive their art as an articulation of the human spirit. Each of us bespeaks his class and his country only insofar as he voices deeply his self, and thereby voices mankind. This is the irreducible character of the artist. Whether he knows it or not (and in our day, most do not know it, whence the fragmentary and corrupted nature of their works and of themselves as men), the artist is one who acts on the premise that the universal lives in the particular; that cosmos lives in the person. This is the meaning of the mysterious words "beauty" and "truth" applied to art. As we share the universal in a particular form—a painting of a tree, a story of a beggar—we call it the experience of beauty. We feel the unity between self and some other object, a unity which (far from destroying) heightens and *makes true* the particularity of both the self and the object. And whether we know it or not, we value this experience of truth and beauty; we love it as somehow good. This is another irreducible trait, beneath our differences, of us all. The conflicts of our actual existence may so weary and confuse us that we believe we long for death; may fill us with distrust and despair; it is love of life, none the less because wounded and twisted, that writes the darkest of our pages. Insofar as a man seeks beauty, he knows that life *is* value; for recognition of beauty is nothing but the joyous acceptance of our part and our participation in the body of living.

In periods of normal cultural rhythm, when the social body moves moderately well in all its organs, this act of conscious participation in life as a whole, the essential act of the artist, can remain implicit in the quiet body of his story or song or picture. Such times see no Congress of Writers such as this one. But today the forms and modes of human existence, unevenly evolved, have broken the equilibrium which is life itself. Today, the active and aggressive faith in life, the revelation of its intricate harmony, which is the sole science of the artist, is so at variance with the actual world, that we feel the need of a direct action, transcending the solid, quiet, slow certainty of art, to reënforce our love and our vision in the experience of the people.

All this may seem to you irrelevant esthetics. But you must pardon me, for the application I wish to draw from it (my brief message to this Congress) is relevant.

We differ, of course, even as in our arts, in our methods of exteriorising our vision and devotion, at this time of crisis, into immediate deeds. My course has been a common one; but

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I must name it in order to clear away all possible misunderstanding. I learned long ago that my devotion to the value of life and my humble part in man's destiny meant war on the capitalist system. I learned a little later that this negative must be completed by positive loyalty to a class into which I was not born, the sole class with the recreative energies and the will to continue mankind's present evolution, the class in which the undifferentiated potencies of man as a whole have not been corrupted and which yet by the nature of its work is in touch with modern thought and modern technics: the class of the workers. Finally, after long deliberation, I have concluded that the best way to enact the political phase of my convictions is to support (despite differences between us of attitude and definition) the Party which is creating the Soviet Union—the Party which in the United States is in the van of the first strong revolutionary movement since Negro slavery was abolished: the Communist Party.

Some of you, I know, have come the same way as I; others have arrived at other political conclusions. Yet, with a few notable exceptions, none of us have done enough; we have not, as writers, given the full measure of our contribution in this hour of history in which (to quote the last words of an old book of mine*) "creation is revolution." This deficiency of the writers, of the consciously revolutionary writers in great part, is at least one of the causes of the delay in the birth of the new world—a delay whose continuance threatens us of the West with that alternative to birth: the death already so menacingly near in Germany and Italy.

The revolutionary hour in which we live is but the present phase of the process, centuries old and destined to outlast almost the memory of economic conflict, whereby man (not a privileged, exploiting class, but man as a whole) will emerge into a conscious culture; even as the child at a certain physiologic stage must become adult or go down into degeneration. The key of the present phase of the long process is economic; therefore the importance of the class struggle and the imperative of entering it on the side of the workers. But the process itself, now as ever, is organic. By which I mean that *the whole of man,* heart and mind, subtlest sense and deepest intuition, as well as belly and loin, must partake of it—or it miscarries.

The orthodox revolutionary creeds, which are the technic of the transition of this crucial hour, do not comprehend the whole man. They stress, rightly, the aspects of mass social-economic action. They slight other parts of man: the intuitive, the intimate, the personal which leads to the cosmic —phases which are the concern of the creative writer. But since the process of man's growth must at all times be entire, these phases too must enter the revolutionary movement. Since they lag, blame not the political leaders but the writers. Since in consequence even the immediate economic aspect of the whole process lags, and threatens to miscarry, again blame (at least in part) the writers.

Excluding the hordes of parasites and pedlars who dare call themselves "writers" only in a world where illiteracy thinks it can "read," we might divide our writers into two groups. The first stress the sensuous, the individual; strive perhaps after the mystic; ignore utterly the masses of men, and that vast region of each man's life involved in economic forces. The other group, often recruited or converted from the first, in the enthusiasm perhaps of their discovery of the social-economic factor limit themselves to it or at least permit their awareness of the intimate, infinite dimensions of human life to become dulled. Their work, like the first group's, is inorganic. And what is worse, the great Cause—man's rebirth—to which they are devoted continues, because of them, deprived of elements needed to make it whole and to make it live.

Of course, the values of the creative writer, as I have named them, are of the very stuff of the Revolution, which indeed is the expression, in terms of urgent human need, of just these values. At the heart of socialism and communism, bequeathed to it direct by Romantics like Rousseau who saved it from the contradictory theological impedimenta of the Church, lies a view of men and of man which the degenerate humanisms of the eighteenth century and the sectarian Protestant creeds had abandoned. It is the view of human history as one organic body, growing by tragic effort towards consciousness and justice; it is the view of the individual (insofar as he is *real*) as an integer of this body, so that the health of the whole and the health of every part are one; it is the view of universal meaning as inherent in material behavior, and therefore of society, becoming by its actions the immanent presence of timeless value. This view, which I call *the organic* view, is implicit in every major artist, however dissident may be his intellectual convictions. It runs with infallible continuity from the Egyptian sculptors and the Hebrew Prophets through the Patrists, through the builders of the Gothic, through the great sixteenth and seventeenth century founders of modern science, through the systems of Spinoza and Hegel—ineluctably leading to the historical-prophetic vision of Karl Marx.

But in the eighteenth century, there had grown strong a counter-current in the thought of Europe. So successful was the conquest of facts about material bodies, the capture of their movements in the laws of mechanics, that certain men, hungry like all men for simplifications, cut down the organic humanisms of Erasmus and Rabelais, the organic rationalisms of Spinoza and Newton, to a dogmatic empiricism of the five-senses. Theirs was a "universe" containing everything that moved by mechanical law—everything, that is, except man. And the victories of applied science were so great that these shallow empiricists swelled in prestige; while the organic view grew enfeebled, being confined to artists with no "scientific" magic to win them credence, to mystics overburdened with theologies that contradicted their intuitions, and to simple men and simple women with no intellectual weapons.

The nineteenth century, of course, brought giants who, in philosophy, literature and the sciences, revived the organic view. In Marx, who belongs to his century's great tradition, the organic view of man is fundamental, and is implicit as in perhaps no other modern thinker except Spinoza and Goethe. But this shallow empiricism was in the air. Marx, over-anxious to attack theological creeds and theological metaphysics, at times fell into the use of easy terms borrowed

* *Our America,* 1919.

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from the vulgar materialists whom he despised as much as he hated the idealists against whom he aimed them. There are contradictions in Marx—great prophet, great historical philosopher, great economist, but too harried a man to be a complete logician. Often on the same page with an unsurpassed word about man's primal unity, in thought and deed, with the dynamic principle of all life, one will find uncritical implications of dualism, echoed phrases from the eighteenth century materialists whom he rejected, implicit denials of the validity and primacy of man's intuitive organic sense—all of which betray the premise of the Marxist dialectic. These flaws in his work have been stressed as virtues in our Western world by sterile men to whom a dogmatic reduction of life to the report of the five-senses offers comfort; and it has been a blight upon our revolutionary growth.

I have no time, nor need, to expatiate upon the symptoms of this blight. The course of socialism in nineteenth and twentieth century Germany, France, England, America, is full of them. Witness the degradation, one might almost say the disappearance, of the *true person* from revolutionary letters as the individual is shrunk from an organic integer of cosmos to a mere quantitative factor of the collective mass, possessing no inwardness—in consequence of which the human mass likewise becomes denatured. Witness the simplification of the human being to a passive product of environment—a fallacy which any man who has ever planted a carrot seed next to a pea in a garden knows enough to laugh at. And the failure, in judging the course, both hideous and heroic, of contemporary events, to allow, in some adequate modern term, for what our fathers fancifully called the demonic and the angelic aspects of human nature. Witness the degradation of literature from being an integral part of life's creative process to a mere reflection of events falsely conceived as "objective" or to a mere instrument for some surface action. Witness, in such poor thought as this, the decay of logic and the decay of metaphysics. Witness, above all, the dangerous failure to distinguish between the true essence of religion—its creative role in human culture—its major role, indeed, in the genesis of socialism, and religion's outworn theological and class superstructures.

All such systems indicate the contempt for human life and destiny which comes when man is cut off from his primitive participation in the cosmos without finding a conscious synthesis (the task of the writers!) to replace it: all, regnant in the vulgar revolutionary thought of Western Europe and America, strike at the very heart of revolutionary meaning.

In agricultural lands, such as Russia, China, great sections of America Hispana, the folk have not lost that immediate integration with life, through soil and self, which is the organic sense in its first phase. The revolutionary doctrines of the West, even with their present limitations, tend to free these peoples from the imposed dualism of their priestcraft, to discipline them for technical advance against the cloudy helplessness in which their misery has mired them, and to release their instinctive monism so that it should flow with ease into the organic view and form of a communist order. This procedure is particularly plain in the Soviet Union where, despite an orthodox terminology which frequently sounds mechanistic or even traditionally dogmatic the true foundations of organic Marxism are understood and are being passionately enacted by the people.

In our industrialised countries, the case is different. Science, prostituted and misapplied, has for a hundred years ploughed down the primitive monistic intuitions of the masses: the same vulgar empiricism which attaints our literature flouts its obscene excesses in every penny paper, every school, every church. The stress on the "environmental," the "behavioristic," the "economic" man, the failure to appeal, in revolutionary terms, to *the whole man,* stimulates the mechanolatry to which we are already enslaved; dims further our enfeebled sense of wholeness from which alone fertility and power issue; and threatens our whole birth-period with disaster.

I do not deny the economic-political causes of fascism. But only psychological and cultural factors in all the people can explain its spread. Among these factors, preëminently in Germany, was the failure of both great revolutionary parties to lead forward into fresh forms of loyalty and action those primordial intuitive energies of man which, balked of their future, flow back into the rotted channels of Church, State, race, devotion to a Fuehrer mouthing decayed loyalties—there, of course, to be exploited by the sinister highpriests of Money.

I do not mean that the revolutionary cause in its present form fails to enlist the heroic loyalties of numbers of men and women. The concentration camps of Hitler give the lie to such a statement, as does every industrial struggle of the world from the Saar to California, where you will find them: the young crusaders for Man, the geniuses of social vision, clear-eyed, quiet of soul. These are the gifted vanguard who, of their own lyric health, absorb and express what is deeply organic in the revolutionary movement. But the world cause cannot rely exclusively on heroes or on the natural poets of action. Its Word must be such as to fire also the more cautious, the more conservatively rooted. And the more subjectively sensitive must also be entrained, those hosts of men and women (teachers, poets, mothers, subtle and humble craftsmen) whose religious and esthetic instincts are balked by the anti-religious and anti-esthetic conventions of most Marxists. For each youth who is driven into the Fascist ranks because he finds it easy to adore his own petty ego magnified in a Fuehrer or a Duce, there are a score of men and women too decent and intelligent to be tempted by these obscene gestures, who yet remain unmoved while the world cries for them, because the orthodox appeal for revolution *seems* to deny those very depths of man, secret and creative, whence their revolutionary will and energy must issue.

The New World of which the old world is in travail is like an embryon. Until it be whole, it cannot be born. What intimate *knowing* moves the embryon, long after its organs and muscles are complete? This knowing of completeness is the final phase of completion. When it is there, and not before, the being issues forth; a new life breathes. . . . I sometimes feel that all the organs, the limbs, the brain and nervous system, of the New World exist. They are the laws of science, the methods of production and communication, the treasures of literature, art, religious wisdom; and, embodying these, the mass of workers possessed of the will and the

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power, together with their indispensable leaders drawn from all classes, the intellectuals, the teachers and technicians. Why, in this hour of travail, when death threatens the generations of man, does not the new life issue? The final integrality is lacking . . . the final completeness which is organic consciousness, the *knowing* harmony of all the parts, making them move to life, making them breathe together. This, within the ready social body, is the function of the writer.

Funeral in May

A poet suddenly cried
  Metaphor metaphor why has thou forsaken me.

Lightly came a taunt from the crowd
  Lo the poor poet!

But the offended voice amplified
  opened the stops
    continued splendid with echo:

The enigmatic certainty that opens in Art like a flower
Is the true worship of God.
  All else is barbarism.
On God we poets depend for being.
  On him all structures rely
    all metaphors hang.

He our source center only energy eternal
Upon which in words in pigment and in sound
We arrange the experience of living
  a bright a gaudy decoration
    a sharp discord.

Ever since my last nervous breakdown I have known this
    to be true.
We the mouthpiece of the divine
  we who have the art to breathe with his breathing
Whose deft fingers play the mass
  feet poised on the pedals
Whose arms swing in the arc of the mural
  whose voice starts from the throat in gold song
In the breathing peace of the Lord;
  We the loud affirmation
The long yea and amen tranquil in unison. . . .

Nevertheless my eyes fail
  perhaps my verses are bad
    Try as I may God eludes me.

Still my taste is of the best
  no one could be better equipped. . . .

Somehow we must stand for the eternal
  the august
    in the midst of crude wars.
Mysticism is a great comfort
  The mystics use symbols. . . .

Not all the gold metaphor of the Roman angels is half so
    wrong
Not even the baroque image
  so wrong as this
    to be literal literal. Alas!
Lovely metaphor redeem me from sin
  and deliver us from meaning.

Then he died
  snap like any business man
    worry overstrain
      burst a blood vessel.
Bury the poet deep in his words came the voice of the infidel
    He will agonize no more.
Pick flowers without scent for his grave.
  There he lies
    Silly boy
So dies the copy of God. He was never happy.
God the grandiose image mocked his wits in all mirrors
Where he loved to indulge in the anxious closeup
  the smile
    the grimace
      and the wince.
A Galahad of grace sustained by six percent in his heyday.
Scoop his grave with the jolly steam shovel.
  One scoop will do.

Turn funeral to fête.
  Carry the effigy off.
    Burn the straw puppet.
A hollow doll made by the rasp of dry words.
Time now to bury the barbaric thing. Or deck it with lilacs
Faded full of rain smelling of ruin.

  And for the flesh-and-blood poet
Take from the darkened room the ghost-haunted glass.
Give him this mark for his grave. Set here for his grave-stone
His perfect companion the mirror. Put it here out of doors,
In its blank write his epitaph out. *Newsreel our day.*
Let windy leaves toss in its flash.
  When we gather fresh laurel
Blow blasts on the factory whistle. Ring loud early bells.
Dance in the meadows
  young and old
    stalwart and swarthy.

Turn funeral to fête.
  Here we inter folly
Gluttonous villainy stupidity the vanity of man.
Again and again we must dance on the grave of this death
Beating down with determined feet what it already dead;
Weeds growing here will wear to rags where we step.
Dance
  it is May
    of all Mays the gayest with promise.
You who are skilled with the songs lead the way with your
    singing.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

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The Cock's Funeral

BEN FIELD

RING was shooting pool late one night in spring when Sandy Clark burst into the pool hall flapping his arms. He cackled and dropped an egg on the pool table.

The egg was big, looked as if Sandy had dug it out of clay.

Sandy swore the egg was from the great gamecock, White Mule. He had boarded White Mule for a rich sporting man from Atlanta. One of his old hens got under White Mule, laid this egg and burst her egg bag at it.

One of the boys reached out with a cuestick. The egg smacked the cueball into a pocket.

Tarr, the barber, held the egg up in the light. "Let's shoot for it. I'm game any old day to take a chance at a throw from White Mule."

The pool hall was packed. Everybody slapped down two bits. It was a lucky break for Sandy with his twelve kids, his wife ready to drop another.

Men and boys paired off and shot for White Mule's great egg. Ring won the egg. He was a better shot than anybody but Stoney, the burrheaded Negro who was handy man around the pool hall.

The fellows hooted around Ring like a bunch of small owls. One said that if Ring didn't succeed with Ella Pierce now he could suck eggs. Another said now he could bowl over old farmer Brady with that egg and get himself higher wages.

Big, mum Ring grinned. He shuffled his broken shoes, weaved his head like a shifty boxer, those brown, easy mitts of his dangling down to his knees. He wrapped up the egg in his handkerchief and walked down to the edge of the town where Ella lived. He fired a clump of grass from behind the oleanders against Ella's window. He spat on the egg and kept wiping it clean.

Ella tiptoed down in her nightgown. They went into the henhouse and put the egg under the fussy bantam hen. The bantam was the best brood hen in the country. She'd mother a stone.

Ella put her hands between Ring and herself. There was something high, wide, handsome about Ella, like about a mallow rose. Ring smelled her days after he'd been with her. He could feel her skin on a fork or plowhandles.

Ella held his hands and whispered huskily that they were talking of laying men off in the sawmill. They were scared for the old man's job as edgeman. Her mother was dogging his heels every living minute he was home. It woudn't be half so bad if she herself could be sure of her own job in the cafe.

Ring shifted from one leg to the other. That Bible-pressed old woman was going to be uglier than a bear now. Said last week she'd no more let her Ella marry a lunkhead farmhand than go to bed with a stable fork.

If the banty hen would do the job, they might have a cock here that would give him more than the ten dollars a month skinner Brady paid. White Mule had been a great winner, a high flyer. Ring had seen him flat on his back left-jab another cock with a sound like a rail hurled against the side of a barn.

Ring gave Ella all the change he had to buy the banty hen a peck of the best poultry feed in town.

Three weeks after Ring had won the egg, the mail carrier stopped off at Brady's farm to tell him the egg was hatched. Looked like a stag. Ring couldn't wait until he was through spraying the peach trees. Foul from fish oil, he hied down to Ella's.

Sure as shooting, it was a stag—gangly, black as coal, shot-eyed. Ring carried the stag to town. The fellows got around the pool table.

Tarr poked it with his finger. The chick fought back.

Sandy gave it whiskey through a straw, rubbed whiskey into its tail. He christened the chick "Orphan Boy," because the hen with the burst eggbag had her head chopped off and White Mule had been killed a few days ago in a great battle.

Tarr made a toast. "Young fellow, knock the stuffiings out of all comers. Jump as many hens as the Jew King Solomon. The big thing always is to take no shit from anybody. That's the big thing in life, Boy. Fight for us. We're a gang here of honest laboring men, not rich bastards. You fight for us, we'll bet on you till the last ditch."

Orphan Boy picked at the green baize and squirted a plug.

The men and boys laughed and said it was the wisest answer ever made to any toast.

Ring took Orphan Boy to the farm. Orphan Boy shot up into a rangy cockerel, lean as a whipstock, body shaped like an iron, a proud head, a fast eye that could nail a fly on the wing. He could spring to a roost eight feet up from a flat-footed start. He stayed up in the trees at night. His crow was stronger than White Mule's, which had sounded like blowing on an empty whiskey bottle. His crow was sweet as song.

The fellows helped Ring train Orphan Boy. Some had lost their jobs in the sawmill. But everybody chipped in to buy gloves, the size of chestnuts, to fit over the spurs. Everybody worked for a winning cock, a great cutter. Even Sandy, who was afraid that the cock might grow up into a turkey-weight, brought over flour and stale bread to make special grub for him, to keep his flesh firm and corky. He helped dub Orphan Boy, trimming comb, gills, wattles. He showed Ring how to sweat and shampoo him.

It was Ring who could best handle the Boy, stroking him from his silk throat to his breast, from hackle to tail. Ring's paws were always better talkers than his tongue. The Boy would bristle up to the others, slyly picking at a twig, a straw, a stone the size of a cobble which could be laid up in a wall, all the time coming closer and closer, then making a sudden feint, jab away with spurs and beak. The fellows would get bloodied up answering his challenge. They'd gloat over his boxing and then his hunting up a hen. They'd go home with some of that fight and heaven for their own women.

At two months Orphan Boy took his first hen. At four months he knocked the devil out of Brady's big barnyard

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rooster with a kick like a hay-tedder. At six months he made Art Smythe's red boar look like a monkey, and won the first bets for the fellows.

Art's red boar was a sly devil. He was one of those chicken-eating hogs. He would bait his old snout with mash and lie down in the sun, snoring to beat the band. The dumb hens would come up to pick at his snout. He'd snap them up before they could let loose more than a cackle. Art strung a wire fence around the hoghouse. The old devil worked his snout through and tore the hens to pieces and dragged them inside.

Sandy was ready to bet his last shirt that the Boy would whip the hog. Art had even money on his hog. Ring held back. But when Ella lost her job, he brought Orphan Boy to Art's place. They hid behind the corncrib. Ring had his shotgun ready, loaded with rocksalt in case the boar was too fast.

Orphan Boy stood on the fence, whetting his bill. He fluttered down into the pen. The boar lay on his slabside, his ugly snout, bristles and all, well baited. Orphan Boy found something in the corner of the pen. He scraped around like a pug getting rosin on his shoes, dug up sod. The boar opened one little red eye, snored, shoved up closer. The Boy circled some droppings, picked up a stick, dropped it, scratched a wing around the boar. The boar didn't budge. Orphan Boy craned his neck to examine the boar's corkscrew tail. He gave the boar a swift jab in the bag. The boar scrambled up with a snort. He wheeled around, stood still with his snout poked out, dozing. Orphan Boy strutted up and talked. The boar snapped. The Boy exploded, flying at the hog with spurs out. He landed on his back. The hog dashed up and down the pen, snorting and kicking. Orphan Boy rode him, flapping his wings. The hens cackled. Over the fence shot Orphan Boy into the hens. Ring got excited and let the gun speak. It poured the rocksalt into the hog's ass. The fellows rolled in the grass, roaring.

At eleven months Orphan Boy made his first kill. He was pitted in the wagon-run of Len Raven's barn. Dreadnought, the other cock, came from another county. He was a battle-scarred red cock with a snaky head, a horncolored beak, and gaffs almost three inches long. The owner was a loom-fixer.

The cocks squared off under lanterns in the barn. The red cock made the first move, feinting, ripping with his left claw at Orphan Boy's bristling neck. He shot at Orphan Boy like a cannonball, driving him back against the crouched men. The Boy ducked. He overflew Dreadnought. Dreadnought turned under him to wreck him. His bloody heel punched out a few feathers. They squared off once more. The smaller cock caught Orphan Boy in the head. Orphan Boy staggered back, dribbling blood.

Tarr tightened his sweaty paw on Ring's neck. The other men and the lint-heads, who had come down with the loom-fixer, urged on the battling cocks. Sandy groaned, "He's tasting blood. Mebbe that'll fire him, fire him sure."

Orphan Boy now changed his attack. He tried for the little veteran's head which hadn't been trimmed well. He ducked, beat off a rain of blows, caught him by the head. He clung to the head like a bulldog, driving his claws, doublebarreled, at Dreadnought's chest. Dreadnought shook him off. The Boy sidestepped again, once more getting him by the head. He topped him and flung the spurs into his back. He pulled the head down and hammered out an eye. The plucky little Red jerked up one wing to protect the head, waded in again. Orphan Boy slashed at the wing. He got him in the other eye. Down went the blinded cock. He spun around on his back, his legs still driving. Orphan Boy shook himself, spotted Ring. He stalked over, picked at a button on Ring's pants and squatted down in front of him.

Other fights came so fast after this that you didn't have enough time to wash the cock, water him, rest him properly in a dark coop. He fought in villages throughout the county, crossed the county line into the mountains, winning every fight, uncoupling wings, breaking legs, putting money into the fellows' pockets.

Tarr took snapshots of Orphan Boy and put them up in his shop and in the pool hall. The Boy's virtues were spread all over the country. His pullets and stags were on every farm. Tarr said, "The cock's bringing us prosperity while all the lousy politicians can't even scratch for us."

Ring got himself a secondhand Ford with a cracked muffler which sounded like a tractor. He bought himself pointed yellow shoes, and Ella, silk stockings. He took her family for rides, treated to ice cream. He went to church with the family and listened to the preacher skin the sinners alive. He sat in the Sunday school with the sawmill boss, Lumpkin the feed man, and Sheriff Luke Smiley. He dropped change on the plate Orphan Boy had cut up another cock for.

The old woman was still set against Ring. Now she blamed him for Pierce's working only two days a week in the sawmill. Hadn't Ring gotten the old man excited about that devilish rooster and brought him down to the barber shop when he should be digging in the garden and thinking of next day's work? Wasn't it enough that Ring kept company with that bunch of shiftless men? Sure, Ring was trying to get the old man under the thumb of that awful barber, who had no more sense than last year's birdnest and was always backbiting against the mill boss, and everybody else more a Christian and a man than he.

The men learned about this.

Tarr said, "Don't blame her for not liking me, but what's she got against the cock? If it wasn't for a cock, she wouldn't be cutting up now."

The whole shop roared.

"Sure." Tarr clapped Ring on the shoulder. "You're unhappy, big boy, because you ain't your own boss. I been a weighman in a gin, millhand, glass blower, cured myself of the con. That's why every time one of you bums gets dosed up he comes whining to me to be cured. One thing I did learn, and that's a man can't be cured of misery while he's got a foreman, a boss riding him. That's why I become a hair butcher. And that's why I ain't got no woman and her mother. When I need my comfort, I pay for it. I'm my own boss. There ain't nothing in the world like being your own boss. Ring, you go tell Brady to go to hell, git yourself a farm, raise game birds from Orphan Boy. You git married and tell the old woman to go fish."

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Ring shook his head, "Ella won't leave her and the old man in the middle of the road."

Sandy snapped his fingers. "We got to git Orphan Boy into the mains. There ain't no reason he can't win. That'll hook the old woman."

Sandy drove down with Ring and the cock to Virge Owens, planter and master of the mains. Owens lived in a big house which looked out on a lake with lilies like white bread. Owens had heard of Orphan Boy. Right off the bat, he offered fifty dollars. He set one of his best cocks against him. Orphan Boy whipped the Duckwing easily. Owens picked up his bird, looked at the ass to see if he were in the pink of condition and then wrung his neck. He gave him to Sandy for chicken dinner. He offered a hundred dollars for the Boy. He said that cocking's a rich man's game. You got to have two hundred and fifty to enter in the mains. It takes at least twenty years to bring up a bunch of good cocks that will make a fair show in the mains. You're always taking chances being raided, having a handler break the legs of your cock. Now all that happened to Ring was that he was like the boy that happened to fall into the river and come out with a diamond ring. Pure accident. And the nigger in the diamond was that you got to be a shrewd business man to make money out of the game. Here Owens offered a hundred and fifty dollars. He took them into the cool big house and treated them to drinks. He offered two hundred dollars.

Sandy gaped at Ring. Ring put Orphan Boy on his shoulder and walked out of the big house.

The barber shop was packed to hear the story of Owens' offers. Tarr banged Ring on the back, "To hell with him. We'll keep the Boy a poor man's fighter."

Old man Pierce lost his job. The bitter old woman tore into Ring and slapped down her last card. He must sell the cock to have Ella. Ella said, "Ma, Ring'll do what he pleases." Ring no longer came to the house but met his girl in town.

The frantic old woman had to yield.

Ring rented a farm near town. He and Ella were married. Men and boys from town came down with cowbells, horns, and all through the night horsefiddled the couple, and Orphan Boy, who was up in the bedroom with them. Soused Tarr roared a lecture on who should be boss.

Ring planned to make a go of it breeding game chickens, raising poultry. He was going to rest the Boy from fighting. He bought a bunch of good hens. Orphan Boy went to work. Eggs didn't sell well. None of the chicks could hold a candle up to the Boy. Ring saw now it would take years to develop the right strain.

Old man Pierce became feeble, slapped around like a fish out of water, couldn't help at all. He couldn't get used to being out of the mill. Had worked there forty years. The boss always saying never seen or heard of an edgeman good as he. Could make two two-by-fours where another man could make only one. Could almost make a two-by-four out of air.

Ella had her baby. Ring had to fight Orphan Boy to keep going. It was hard getting good fights. There was mighty little cash around for betting. Many more were out of work. Everybody had heard about the Boy. Cockfighters were afraid to put their birds against him.

A big fight was arranged at last out in the woods near a turpentine still. Orphan Boy played around with the other cock for a couple of minutes and then pressed, fell on him like a bolt and sent him flying out of the ring, crowing with terror. As the men were coming out of the woods, cars swept down the road. Men with shotguns and whips jumped out shouting.

Ring and Orphan Boy managed to escape. This raid was followed by the preachers in town thundering hot sermons against cockfighting. And then Sheriff Luke Smiley, his big nose poked into everybody's wind, broke into the barber shop one night when the shades were down and the boys were drinking. Said he thought a cockfight was on.

Stoney the Negro had it from a mule-skinner who knew a fellow who baled hay for Owens that Owens was out in his car the night of the raid with a gang of men. Sandy saw Owens talking and laughing with Sheriff Smiley. Owens himself stopped Ring in town and asked maybe now he'd change his mind. Tarr and the others got so sore they talked of raiding Owens. Nothing came of it, however.

The corn and potatoes didn't come up. The soil on the rented farm was so poor you couldn't raise a fuss without fertilizer. Ring had to go to Brady. The old skinner wouldn't have him. He couldn't find work elsewhere. They started eating the game hens.

The old woman kept after Ring with her sour tongue and her hands heaped with veins like chicken guts. Here they were hungry and could get two hundred dollars selling the cock. The cock came before his wife and family. All he could think of was fighting, loafing in town with that barber. "Lazy as Cain. Too lazy to git off the seat of your britches. You ought to be too lazy to live."

The old man had no more to say than a sat-on log. Only Ella argued, "Ma, it ain't no use getting mad. Ring's easy-going and——"

"Easy going into you," snapped the old woman. "Sell that cock."

Ring had never answered the old woman back. This time he muttered thickly, "Go sell yourself," and went to town.

Only a corporal's guard of the boys left, hanging around the shop—slopped over in the shadows, staring at a wench passing by with her hips working in her dress, the smoke of the sawmill hanging like a poor rope over the town. Some had joined the CCC camps. Others were in Atlanta hunting work. Young Tetley had joined the Navy. Sandy had lost his farm. You couldn't scare up a job anywhere. Even the pool hall ran up a sign: "No trust please. We trust in the pig's——," with a picture of a farmer plumbing the pig.

They got down to the last hen, which Ring would not kill. She was for Orphan Boy. Ella went to town with Ring to the relief. While he waited outside, she followed the long line into the courthouse where relief was given. The relief promised an investigator.

They got back to find the old woman had killed the last hen for soup. Ring stood a long time staring at her, his hand muzzling his mouth. He went out looking for the Boy.

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The Boy strutted up to him, grabbed his pants leg. Ring put the Boy on his knee. "Won't even let you have a piece." The cock talked deep in his chest, snugggled closer. Ring kept stroking him.

The investigator came out in a coupe. A girl with slim, silked legs like cuesticks, a chalked face. Stuck her nose into everything, even into the backhouse to see how they were eating. She spotted Orphan Boy in the yard tackling a heel of old bread. She said, "People that want relief oughtn't be wasting bread on a rooster."

Her visit brought no answer from the relief office.

The old woman nagged until Ring went down to the courthouse alone. The man in charge sat behind a desk with a blotter green as a pool table. "We've got to be careful with the taxpayers' money. We've got to see those that really need relief get it. Would it be fair to give relief if you didn't need it and take it away from the real needy?" His eyes tightened as if he were taking a shot. "There's people like the Tetleys been living on grits. There's others." He smiled. "That Orphan Boy is a real fighter, a gambling rooster."

Ring shifted his legs. "He ain't fought now a long time."

"Sell him or cook him. Then we would know."

Ring's fist was full of sweat. He walked out, wiping his hand. He shuffled down to the shop.

Tarr was honing a razor. He looked up. "How's the Boy?"

Ring told him about the relief man.

Tarr's spit burst like shot out of his mouth. "Gambling rooster; they won't say that to Owens. No. But a poor man, he oughtn't have nothing."

Tarr spat on the stone.

Ring watched him a long time. When he got up to go, Bruce Jenkins came in. Bruce heard the story and cursed a blue streak. He told about a new mill and houses going up the other side of the mountains. Might get work there.

Ring decided to go. But he couldn't bear to tear himself from Orphan Boy. The Boy wasn't acting just right. He stood for a long time looking down at him. He gave Ella long careful orders how to take care of him.

He was gone a month. The car broke down in the mountains. He had to hike back. He returned with a sack of flour, slab of bacon, a hen and corn for the cock.

He had hardly set foot in the yard when the old woman flew at him like a knife. He would have found skeletons home if not for a bag of food from the church. The relief hadn't even peeped to them, all because of that hell fowl.

Ring hurried to the pen. Orphan Boy was lumped up in the corner, feathers matted, bill cheesy-looking. Ring cleaned and watered him. But he picked only halfheartedly at the squatting hen Ring held for him.

Ring spent the whole day with him. He let him range far and wide, gave him corn from the palm of his hand. He kept him away from the hen. Orphan Boy had always been too much of a colonel with his hens, scratching for them, giving them all he had.

Ella sat up in bed patiently waiting for Ring. He came in worried. He woke at dawn and listened. Always at dawn the cock's song was fresh and sweet as dew. He heard no song or call out of the Boy. He hurried from bed, barefooted, fixing his pants. He looked in the trees. Ran out into the road, calling and whistling. Found him on a sandhill with his wings spread as if a hen had slipped from under him the last moment.

Ring held the old Boy to his chest. The head hung limp, wet with dew. A spider had woven a web round his spurs. Ring thumbed the spurs clean. He sat in the yard holding the cock while the sun climbed.

He got up with the stirring in the house, put on his yellow shoes. He laid Orphan Boy in his coat. Ella called after him. He didn't answer. He set his face like a plow towards town. Ella hurried for the baby and caught up with him.

They walked silently in the dusty road, she with the baby, he holding the Boy. They came up to Jenkins' farm. Bruce was splitting wood. He craned over his wood, walked up to look. "Jesus Christ!" He flung his axe down and went along.

The road went downhill. A cow was cropping grass along the road. Old man Tetley and his Jennie rose up from the roadside with sticks. Tetley hobbled over, looked at the Boy, and groaned, "And I won five dollars, made a piece of living off'n him once." But how could he leave Jennie alone with the cow? Lumpkin had a twelve-dollar mortgage on her. They had to watch her day and night, else he'd come take her. Jennie cried, "We kin take her."

Ring stalked ahead with the Boy clutched to his chest. Tetley drove the cow right behind him. As they came up to the crossing, Sandy hurried down, hollering. He jumped the tracks. Ring opened up the coat. Sandy's hand twitched. He stroked the limp head with a thumb. "Sons of bitches, sons of bitches." He dashed to the boxcar into which he had moved Mary and his young ones.

All along the road to town the sight of dead Orphan Boy roused people. When Ring got to the edge of town, a great crowd was with him. The crowd choked the street in front of Tarr's shop. You couldn't get in the shop or out. Tarr was afraid he'd cut his customer's throat. He shoved out into the crowd. Sandy yelled, "Come on, Tarr." Tarr got on the bench which always stood in front of his shop.

The people listened. They touched Orphan Boy. They stared down the street. A boy picked up a feather. He stuck it into his cap.

The town was humming with Saturday trade. Cars shoved up against the big stores like a litter of sucking pigs. Tarr jumped down off the bench. The customer ran out with lather on his face. "Hey, Tarr, where you beating it?"

Tarr punched his fist over his head. "Come on, the shaving kin wait. We got the Boy's funeral to 'tend first."

Ring shifted the cock higher. The Tetleys drove their hornhipped cow. Sandy, Tarr, Bruce and the others stepped out ahead. The women and children followed. The merchants peeked through their doors. Lumpkin steered himself like a lopsided duck far back into his store. Sheriff Luke Smiley hurried up from in front of the bank. He jerked up his hand. He jerked up both as a rotten peach smacked him. His hat sailed across the street. He slapped his hand on his bald head, turned tail and disappeared in an alley. The crowd followed Orphan Boy and the cow down through the town to the courthouse.

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Some American Communists

JOSEPH FREEMAN

[*This is an excerpt from the author's forthcoming book.* An American Testament, *which will appear in the spring. This section refers to the narrator's contacts with the American Communist Party in 1922, when the* Liberator *was the organ of the revolutionary writers and artists of this country.*]

ALTHOUGH *The Liberator* was in no way officially connected with the organized communist movement, I frequently went to Party headquarters to get material for editorials, or to obtain an article from some member of the Central Committee. In this way I became acquainted with several leading communists, whom I had known only by reputation.

Of Bill Dunne, we had heard a great deal as the hero of Bloody Butte. He was a worker who had come into the communist movement through direct struggle with the exploiting class. For years he had been active in the copper-miners' union and the Democratic Party of Montana. He played poker with Burt Wheeler and had been elected to the state legislature on the Democratic ticket. For a long time Bill had not seen the disparity between his politics and his trade unionism. The open-shop drive which swept America after the war disillusioned him. He published a paper for the union; when the employers attempted to suppress it, he took the printing press to an abandoned church. The mine-owners sent armed thugs to seize the press by force. But Dunne and his wife Marguerite had taken rifles with them. They kept up a running fire until they drove off their attackers. By the time they left Montana and came east, they were convinced communists. Their experiences, combined with their reading of revolutionary literature, had led them to believe that communism alone offered a solution for the American workers, as for workers in all countries.

This was the story I had heard about Dunne when I began to meet him frequently, in the fall of 1922 and in the following spring, at Party headquarters, at John's restaurant on East Twelfth Street, at the *Liberator* office. He was short and stocky, with a tremendous barrel-chest, solid as a rock, and a dark, heavy, Irish face. His close-cropped bullet head and thick neck gave him the appearance of great physical power; and his deep, husky voice, pouring out a flood of rhetoric, witty and incisive, revealed a mind that was at once brilliant and too fanciful for a practical politician. His whole body, built like a retired prizefighter's, shook with repressed laughter when he told an anecdote. Dunne's reading was wide, ranging from Lenin to Joyce. On the platform he thundered in the style of the nineteenth-century orators, and his articles in the Party press were florid, colorful and full of acid.

Dunne's chief interest was the trade union movement. The Party was then setting its face against dual unionism and had raised the slogan of "boring from within" the conservative unions. Dunne was carrying out that policy in the American Federation of Labor, of which he was still a member.

Occasionally he dined in the Village with the *Liberator* crowd, with whom he felt a certain affinity as a frustrated man of letters. He had the traditional Irish poetry in him, and wanted to write some day, if only an autobiography. Until then he would content himself with the next best thing—talking about literature. Yet his contempt for the literary trifles of bohemia was boundless. Himself strongly sensuous and full of the love of life, he derided intellects dribbling their power away on the abstractly erotic. Good literature in our day, he said, could arise only out of the class war. He often used the word "intellectual" as a term of contempt, as I had heard Louis Smith use it in the slums a decade earlier. This time, however, I understood that what the communist organizer scorned was not intellect—which Lenin, for example, had to the degree of genius—but the phony arrogance of the bohemian literati who fancied they had a monopoly on brains and knowledge, whereas they actually understood nothing of the essential struggles of our epoch. There was this paradox, too: the intellectuals in the Party pretended to be interested only in the working class; Dunne, himself a worker, was also interested in the intellectual.

I first met **William Z. Foster** through Louis Smith, and was pleased that he who had first introduced me to communism in boyhood should now introduce me to the chieftain of the great steel strike and an outstanding Party leader. A worker by origin, the product of stockyard, street-car, factory and ship, Foster looked more like an intellectual than most professors I had met. His thin, wiry body was surmounted by a large head which rose from a round, strong chin to a broad forehead and temples enlarged by baldness. His clear blue eyes were by turns austere and mild, his voice soft. Foster talked only about the class war. His questions about my European life ignored art and literature, Dada, the Rotonde, *la vie de bohême*. These did not exist for him. He wanted to know about the trade unions, the growth of the communist movement, international politics. Anything he said about himself was a parenthetical illustration of a general law of revolutionary strategy or a trade union principle.

"That's no good," he would say about some suggestion. "I tried that in the Chicago stockyards, and it doesn't work."

Then, merely to clarify his point, he would tell his experiences in organizing the stockyard workers. More personal characteristics emerged by accident. When we had dinner in a Third Avenue cafeteria, I discovered that Foster neither smoked nor drank, and that he was a vegetarian. But he had no puritanical precepts on these matters. The problems of personal conduct which agitated us in the Village did not interest him. He was ascetic by a standard which determined all his actions. The class-struggle was the most important thing in the world, and for that struggle he

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wanted to keep physically, mentally and morally fit. A touch of tuberculosis which he had cured by shipping as a sailor for several years, a bad heart which was eventually to incapacitate him, obliged him to be especially careful.

Within the Party, Foster had an engaging modesty; in contact with the enemy-class there emerged a powerful pride in which his person and his class were identical. Once the Newark police broke up a street meeting at which he spoke. The Civil Liberties Union—of which Foster was then a leading member— protested and was told that if Foster would appear in person before the city commission and ask for a permit he would be allowed to speak. Foster took me with him to Newark. We were ushered into a large, smoke-filled room in the city hall, with a heavy oak table in the center, wooden arm-chairs, and a red plush carpet studded with spittoons. The five commissioners sat around the table sullenly. They were either too fat or too thin; their faces were sallow and smirking, the typical faces of petty machine politicians. One of the commissioners, a tall, gray-haired man with tortoise-shell glasses, politely asked us to sit down. Then, very politely, he asked Foster when he wanted to speak, under whose auspices, on what street-corner, on what subject, what literature was going to be distributed. Foster answered gravely, quietly, respectfully. His views were well-known, he would say what he had said at hundreds of meetings throughout the country, he would distribute the literature which the Newark police had illegally confiscated at his last meeting. Would Foster guarantee there would be no disturbances?

"Any disturbance I've ever seen at a workers' meeting," Foster said, "was created by the police or the American Legion."

This polite conversation went on for over an hour. Suddenly one of the silent commissioners, a fat, pudgy little object, yelled: "We're wasting time! We know what you're here for, Mr. Foster. You're here to make revolutions! We won't let you do it, understand? You can't speak in Newark."

"I am here," Foster said, "to exercise my right as an American citizen to discuss publicly economic and political questions. You said if I applied in person for a permit you would grant it. I am applying for it now."

The commissioners laughed. "You can't talk in Newark," the grey-haired man with the glasses said. "Not while we run this town. This conference is over." The commissioners stood up.

Foster's face turned white, then very red. He turned to me and said in a strained voice: "Let's go."

"No hard feelings, Mr. Foster," one of the commissioners said.

Foster did not answer. We walked out of city hall and for several blocks neither of us spoke. Then Foster broke out: "Goddam their dirty hides! They can't even keep a promise. I am the physical, mental and moral superior of any man in that room; I could wipe Newark with all five of them at once; and I've got to crawl on my hands and knees before them to beg for permission to speak. A permit to which I'm entitled—which they promised!" Then he quieted down and said gravely: "It wasn't meant for me. The working class has no rights under capitalism."

Later, when the Party took over the *Liberator,* I shared a back room at headquarters with Louis Engdahl, one of the five socialists indicted in Chicago during the war, now editor of the *Weekly Worker,* official communist organ. Engdahl was a tall, redfaced middle-westerner with greying hair carefully brushed back and heavy glasses. He spoke in a flat monotone and seldom laughed. In conversation, oratory and articles he was a master of cliché; but he worked with the energy and endurance of ten men. No matter how early in the morning you came, or how late at night you left, Engdahl was busy at his desk. He did not leave it even for lunch, but nibbled at a dry sandwich or a piece of chocolate while typing or editing copy. He made up for lack of originality by a boundless loyalty to the cause in which his whole being was wrapped up. I worked by his side day after day for six months, and saw him frequently in subsequent years until his untimely death, and we were friends; yet it was a rare occasion when he referred to the little he had of private life. Everything revolved for him around the movement. If we went for a soda, he would ask the clerk about conditions in the drug-stores; after a movie, he would lecture you about the importance of the film, how it concealed real conditions and bamboozled the masses. His greatest passion, however, was the revolutionary press; to this he gave the best of his enormous energy and loyalty; and as time went on I could not help comparing the permanent results of his devoted plodding with the ephemeral flashes of more brilliant but less disciplined journalists on the fringes of the movement.

Now and then I had conferences with the Party secretary, C. E. Ruthenberg, a blond, blue-eyed Nordic of German stock, native of Cleveland, son of a longshoreman, accountant by profession. He had given up that profession long ago when he became an organizer for the Socialist Party in his twenty-sixth year. We had heard of him for years as a leader of the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement. When the United States entered the War in 1917, he was among the most vigorous champions of the St. Louis resolution. His active propaganda against the war resulted in arrest; he was sentenced to a year in prison. Released on bail while his appeal was pending, he ran on the Socialist ticket for mayor of Cleveland, basing his campaign on uncompromising opposition to the war. Despite military mobilization, war hysteria, official terror and White House demagogy, Ruthernberg received more than one-fourth of the votes cast in the election. Shortly afterwards, his appeal was turned down by the higher courts and he was imprisoned in Canton for ten months. By the time he was released the War was over. Resuming his activities in the Socialist Party, he organized and led the May Day demonstration in 1919, in which forty thousand Cleveland workers participated, including fifty A. F. of L. unions. Cleveland police and Ohio state troops attacked the demonstration with fire arms and tanks. In the street fighting which followed two policemen were killed. The police retaliated next day by wrecking the Socialist Party headquarters. This demonstration led to an increase of the party membership and of Ruthenberg's reputation as a clear-headed, courageous leader.

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That was the year the Socialist Party split on the question of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist International. Out of the Party's left wing, which Ruthenberg helped to organize, there grew two separate communist parties. The government's reply to the beginning of the communist movement in America was a series of raids on both parties in all sections of the country. Eventually Attorney General Palmer boasted that ten thousand workers were arrested in those raids; four thousand of them were in prison at one time. Leaders of both communist organizations —among them Ruthenberg, who was now in New York— were indicted under various "criminal syndicalism" and "anarchy" laws. This mass terror against the revolutionary workers launched by the democratic and idealistic Woodrow Wilson in the interest of the propertied classes had its effect: the young communist groups were crippled. They were compelled to organize an underground movement in which Ruthenberg played a leading role. Illegal life cut the two parties off from the mass of American workers; they became sectarian and sterile; their chief activities were internal party propaganda, conflicts between the two parties, debates about abstract theoretical points. Ruthenberg was among those who favored bringing the communists into open contact with the workers. He had begun to elaborate plans in this direction when he was put on trial under his New York indictment, convicted, refused bail and imprisoned in Sing Sing. During his imprisonment, the two underground parties united and by the end of 1921 organized the open Workers (Communist) Party. Shortly afterward, Ruthenberg was released from prison and the legal party made him its secretary.

This was the abstract picture I had of Ruthenberg when I met him in the fall of 1922. I was surprised to find him a tall, suave, handsome man, under forty, dressed in neat grey tweeds and a white starched collar. There was no "proletarian" pose about this proletarian revolutionary, that is, nothing bohemian. His desk, facing a window that looked out on Broadway and Eleventh Street, was orderly, as was the bookcase in which he kept the writings of Marx and Lenin. His long narrow face with its large forehead and prominent nose was fair and pink; when he smiled his bright blue eyes became narrow slits. I never heard him raise his voice in conversation; he always spoke calmly and methodically. On several occasions he explained the Communist Party to me. At my request he wrote an article on the subject which I published in the *Liberator*. In his article, Ruthenberg said:

> In the three years that have passed since the open Communist convention of 1919, the Communist movement in this country has undergone a transformation. . . . It does not expect to convert the workers to a belief in the Soviets and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat by merely holding up the example of European experience. Its campaigns and programs of action are based upon the actualities of the life of the workers in the United States.

The Party was becoming realistic. It was a section of the international revolutionary movement operating on the national terrain out of which it sprang, in which it was rooted. Just now it was agitating the slogans of working within the conservative trade unions, of organizing a united front of the workers, a Labor Party in the United States.

The Library

SAUL LEVITT

EIGHTEENTH STREET, an iron desert; down on the ground floor, at the stand, where he sipped fizz water, wiped his face, he could hear the hum of wheels, a vibration through the old buildings whose floors supported tons of machinery, for weaving and printing. And the freight elevators, hydraulic, with men pulling at a cable for starting and stopping. A clanging everywhere, in the machinery shops, on the streets. The handtrucks in the gutters got stuck in the soft macadam. On the noon hour men and boys came down, to stand around in the shadow of the back entrances, watching the girls go by.

Walking through these streets he found work again for the rest of the summer on the tenth floor of an old, grumbling, vibrating pile of brick and iron on eighteenth.

All day he walked around a machine whose propellors twined silk and cotton into a cording. Cotton on a backboard, silk on little prongs, all the ends converging through an eye, and if you closed your eyes and put your hands on the strands you felt them twisting in your hand, caressing and rubbing the hand, silk caressing, cotton fibres catching the hand.

There were thirty machines on the floor, making the cording, all of them painted green, a bright green, and these big, green fellows going together made the most terrific racket he had ever heard in his life, deafened him slightly for the time that he worked there; getting the job on a Monday, after eight, coming up to that roaring tenth floor, he could hear its thunder down on the third floor, feel it in the elevator, and when the door opened on the tenth it hit him in one great wave of sound. The big, green fellows all going together, the bobbins jiggling and dancing.

Afterwards it was easier. He was able to say to Ida after three days, "I'm used to it." He had never told them why he quit Stone's. He thought it would sound crazy to tell them that he was through there, no use staying there anymore.

He got used to that roar, it got so that he didn't even mind it at all, only that when he went down to the street —*that* was the strange place, so quiet with trucks grinding and people yelling. Eight to five-thirty, tending a machine, forty minutes for lunch—the only time you really talked on the job, when you went downstairs and sat on a stool at the "Busy B" counter for a frank and soda. But not too much talk on the job, no use trying to talk, the noise was discouraging; so you just floated along in the sea of sound, not even hearing it, and you learned the little tricks of the trade.

The boy on the next machine told him if he wanted to get away for a minute he could cut the half-finished spools of silk and cotton and get full ones in the stockroom; you put them on, and then faded off into the washroom, and shut the door and lit a butt. God! Heaven, sitting on the bowl and reading last week's *News*, smoking a cigarette. Talking to the other fellows in the washroom, looking out

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of the window where the back walls of other buildings strike the eye, the open windows directly across, with girls at sewing machines.

"Some nice heads there," laughed an Italian boy, working next to him. They stood there for seconds, whistling to the girls who waved back on the hot afternoons.

"O-o-o-hh, Marreyootch!" shouted the Italian boy.

Then someone might hear, Willie, the heavy foot of Willie Kohler, the big, puffy-faced German foreman who tried to be hard and didn't know how. They dived behind the toilet onto the seats, and they heard Willie's voice roar: "Come on out, you guys, have ye all got diarrhea?" Silence over the washroom. "Numbers six and four, I've stopped your machines, you guys; the spools are all out." He shut the door and went off. He hated to catch them in the washroom, that was why he stopped so heavily outside the door; and when he did catch someone he ordered the boy out with watery eyes turned slightly away.

A science, the business of cutting up your spools to get away from the machine; and Hesh bettered his instructor, horrifying Joe Pinelli by clipping a dozen spools and setting up new ones, and getting into the toilet for an hour, with an occasional peep out to see if Willie was around. He worked it out coolly, it started him reading more than he had ever read before; he got the *News* on the way downtown every morning and then he added the *World,* and he took one and the other into the toilet and read them from cover to cover; it was the simplest thing you could do to get away from that racket and the monotony of stalking around those machines. You couldn't sit down while working, even though a box over the belt could serve for a seat. Not allowed.

So into the washroom, the stinking library, reading, getting hot over the picture of the winner of the Bathing Beauty contest at Atlantic City, getting absorbed in the obituary notices, the new shows, the illness of General Wood, Governor-General of the Phillipines; and he finally got down to the editorial pages, his mind working ideas out of them with a certain shyness. The *World* lamming Tammany Hall, Rollin Kirby's cartoons of bluenoses—good, laughing over them, heh heh; Heywood Broun funny fellow. Better get back now.

A science, boy, got it down to a science. He drank more water too than he ever did before in his life, a dozen times a day over to the oasis, the water-cooler. Save a second by letting it run, then drink, drink slowly, then get down to the machine, and to hell with Willie, sit down on the box in back, the strap wheeling underneath tickles the rear end. Sit there; and sitting there he learned that a little breeze came off the propellers. He soaked his handkerchief in water and wet his face to feel the coolness of the breath of wind off the propellers.

He got to know the machine well—when it needed oil, and he even could tell when the spools were running out, by just glancing at the cording after it was finished. Not enough red, needs more red silk. . . . Even a little feeling for the machine, a feeling very small, like the breath of wind off the propellers, at the smoothness of it, how it purred after the Friday afternoon oiling, throwing oil on your face; putting your hand on it, along the steel rod holding the silk bobbins, feeling the mighty thrum in the fingers. Listen to her, what a big baby, *whoooooooh.* Just right now! Oil again next Friday at five o'clock. . . .

He shuts off the power. The blurring propellers slow down, take shape as slender steel rods. Then he gets the oil-can and squirts into little oil-holes here and there, and he starts the machine again and listens to it, and he shoots oil again. Warm weather, about five-fifteen now; he wants to get it finished by five-thirty and make the line for the pay-checks at five-thirty. Get it finished now. Over the floor there are single roars. A machine going on for a second, to see how she runs, off again. On and off. Clop-clop, holiday in the air, no work until Monday morning. Sunlight stroking the green machines.

Perfect, *whoooooooh.* Perfect. He hunts around for a rag. Never a rag around here to rub off that surface oil. He runs around the floor hunting for rags and finds a big wad of paper with greasy finger stains over it, and goes back to his machine. Twenty after five, he rubs the paper over it, not so hot for wiping oil off but what the hell. Twenty-five after. Minutes drag on Friday as you wait for that time-clock to hit five-thirty.

He takes the oil-soaked paper into the stinking library and sits himself down on the bowl for a smoke, also he rolls out the paper and inside it is still readable and also useful afterward since they are careful here not to supply much paper for the library. So he reads a letter, torn across, on the Sacco-Vanzetti case and on the other side is the funny fellow —two of them as a matter of fact, Frank Sullivan and this other fellow, Broun.

Broun is writing on Sacco and Vanzetti. At places, the boy pauses.

> By now there has been a long and careful sifting of the evidence in the case. It is ridiculous to say that Sacco and Vanzetti are being railroaded to the chair. The situation is much worse than that. This is a thing done cold-bloodedly and with deliberation. But care and deliberation do not guarantee justice. Even if every college president in the country tottered forward to say guilty they could not alter the facts.

He stops reading for a second, pursing his mouth a little and rubbing his oily hands along the old shirt. Outside a solitary clopping sound, one machine still tuning up.

Ping! Pay!

He goes out of the washroom, throws his jacket on, gets on the payline. Out on the street and free for the weekend. Free! He runs along through the streets of the iron desert, turning into Fifth Avenue and going south to Union Square and going across the Park they are talking about Sacco and Vanzetti, big and little clusters of men talking and listening, and he stops to listen, the dark-faced kid, his brows crinkling. Listening. . . .

And overhead another sound all of a sudden, and all the heads lift for a second into the fading sunlight winging over the big town; over the new skyscrapers, the old skyscrapers, the changing skyline a plane wings, drones, the late afternoon sun catching the silver wing.

He plunges down, down below the city in the enormous crowd to the Lexington Avenue subway platform at Union Square, into the electric train, where the sweating crowd stands quietly, trying to read the evening news.

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The Shape of the Sun

When they talked last night it seemed somehow
not clear; in the shack's gray blackness
stumbled only his voice
And hers, dry, strong, like a dust wind
husked of its fury.
He'd mutter; make some noise, maybe keys
jumbled with matches in his pocket,
or his fist on the table.
She kept jerking at him, urging, until
I covered my ears and lay sweating,
The hard blanket over, the planks below,
pressed like a bug between
two stones.
In the bat hours I wakened twice hearing him
roll in unrest.
Then this morning bird-early I found them
outdoors, and I wondered, waiting on
Their faces: his broad-templed but thin where
the cheek furrows cut square to the chin;
hers bleak,
Harsh as brambles, peaked with a dry
thorny strength.
He stood turned to the coming sun. From a
gaunt tree, wings flashed like
two hands with spread fingers,
Closed, spread again. . . .
"It's Redbeam,"
she said into the flapped color
While the call still echoed. "He allus
crows like a house afire; sure thinks
he can hog-call the sun to breakfast."
We watched the cock stiffen on the cracked
branch, swell,
Rake at the air, and shrill, his black
sliver tongue forking the light.
". . . aimed to chop it down," she was saying,
"but Redbeam likes it to roost on. We don't
need it for wood. We got plenty
When the barn blew down; no use building again
with the stock
Petered out like this. Listen," she said,
moving off, "I'm going in. You and
him come along
In a shake. He'll feel more like eating
after a bit; and he's got
To eat. Stewing don't take the place of it."
I bent to watch a couple of
beetles labor
In their brittle skins, struggling for food
to keep life crisp in them.

Spit passed me in a spray of sudden stars,
then darkened the earth—
False rain drawing the dust in puckers—
and he squatted the way Indians crouch, tireless,
And looked strangely over the familiar ground:
the land, lizard-flat, raising small
Rough-headed humps to remind him of what
his eyes veered to avoid. I
moved to a weathered mound
Of straw, bedding for field mice, solid,
but uneven to sit on.
Dry balls of earth scuttled from heel
when I shifted, making me think
of the stony excrement
Of West Coast kitchen middens built
like this flattop
Only bigger, higher, and the fishermen, flint-
faced, chipped to shadows when famine
Fingered their edges.
"Christ!" he said,
jumping up. "She don't understand how I love
this hole,
This rotten spot where even a grasshopper
can't spit tobacco juice
And rock on his legs in comfort!" His mouth
strained to say more but she came, calling,
so we went in,
He again, silent, turning words inward
like spikes in a harrow
Stirring the thoughts in his mind.
After he'd
hammered through scrapple and hotcakes,
sucked at his dogtooth,
And pushed off somewhere, I said: "What's
eating him?" She, grim,
Pitched down the spider:
"It's Sam Calkin's
place. Th'eviction's today
And he," back-tossing her thumb towards the
door gaping open, "won't go stand
with the rest against the
Sheriff and his pack of stinkhounds!"—neither
of us noticing then,
And we didn't care later, how the grease
gathered on the slant and ran over,
cooling gray
On the pan's brown edge like snow on a rut
of gumbo, while her voice
Kept grinding. "Sam's a good man. Take him
or near any farmer, take us for example.
We've dried up
Along with the land and now they want to
shovel us off.
I s'pose *we* made the drought, *we* set the
black rust to firing the fields, *we're*
The rabbit-heads that thought up the stunt
to plow under, to slaughter our stock!"
She caged the space between stove
And table with her hard walk, flinging force
into her words
So they seemed beaked, pointed with power.
After a moment she cracked a dry
grin, as suddenly

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Gone. "Did you know? the Government sold
us their stored-up wheat
At one-sixty-five a bushel. We could've
got it for half or less—thirty-five
some places." "For cash,"
I said. We both laughed, but the sound
spun a flatness in the room
That unscarred laughter never leaves
behind. "I see you already know.
Who don't?" she said to my nod. "It's plain enough."
In us clearly the picture
complete as if she'd run
And fetched some ragged roll of paper with
the legend in print:
How the farms were good farms, and the land,
and the stock. But the loans were late,
like long-held rain dropped
Thinly. Then the drought's thick dust—
and black rust brushing its foxtail
Through the starved grain. Many farmers
left sections uncut: binding twine
cost so much, and the wheat
Hardly heavy enough to shock, barely fit
to be flung to the hogs.
"D'you blame us for binning what little we
could? That or the gravel pits for him
This winter if we're to skin through.
'Dollar for Dollar!' We can't even
pay back 'Bushel for Bushel!'
That man here yesterday, training his
snout on every corner
As if something smelled and he'd find it,
he said the Government'd loan us . . ."
I'd turned without moving toward a small
Whistling lifted up like a bird somewhere
outside, and I thought
Maybe he, maybe Jess—
". . . minus the first
seed and feed loans and interest!
Plus mortgage . . . so hog-tied now we can't
never lap water when it rains. I told
Jess talking's no use.
He's got to fight like Marsh and them others
of us is doing, He's got . . ."
Marsh had the lean face of his
brother—of Jess. The bones went
the same way, jutting so the eyes
Seemed very deep, their brightness like the
peering of an animal from its hole.
"Sam Calkin . . ."
"Listen," I said, "what
time's the eviction? You and I, if we——" "I
Thought of that," she answered. "We'll have to
walk, no gas in the car, and it's a good
three mile. But we've
Plenty of——Why, it's stopped!" with her eyes
narrowed on the clock
Sitting quiet as a tame cat waiting to be touched
and it would purr again. "Jess!" from
the door-sill yelling,
"What time you got?" He popped up from some-
where near, his mouth
Stopped round on a whistle or maybe fixed new
with astonishment, a whittled stick shining
like wheatstraw in one hand
And the knife in the other. His face seemed
brighter. "Ma," he said.
She: "The time, what time is it?"
It was then
that the telephone signaled——
A hollow weak sound before the real ring trilled——
and our noses were full of the smell
of his movement,
With sweat with sun with the odor of dust on
a man's farm clothes,
And he now tense to a mouse-squeak in the
wall that told sharp news. By his voice
too much was happening and
His mind balked the way a full bucket
refuses more water.
With the receiver stumbled onto its hook, he
swung, staring, looking as if morning
had come too soon
And he still lifting sleep's weight with his
eyelids. She probably
Bruised on the table squeezing past to reach him
where he sat. Terror had pressed graywhite
On his mouth but fury now burned his ears red,
and his dogtooth showed its clean fang
where the lip Curled.
"By God!" he said. "The bastards! They
got him!" "Who?"
"Marsh! They say Marsh just killed the sheriff!"
"What?" and our babel swam
in the room:
"They're crazy!" "Marsh always warned against
force, he never carries
A gun!" One thought reared free, "We got to get
there fast!" jerked up at
remembering the car,
No gas. "Jess, I'll call——"
"No!" he
said. "Here, grab this!"
Shoving the night lamp to me, the jarred
mantles shaking clay-colored
Ash on my wrists as I ran carrying, hearing
the soft slup of liquid between my
two hands,
And them coming after with other things——
likely a funnel
Or a measuring cup with a spout, and
the unused lamp from the storage hole
that might have a splatter
In it to get us to Marsh waiting
with the bars black
On the shape of the sun, and the gathered
farmers coming with fists up, strong as an army of bulls.

CLARA WEATHERWAX

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THEATRE CHRONICLE

AT THIS DATE, I doubt if Mr. Clifford Odets needs to be introduced. In case he does require an introduction, however, allow me to state that he is the young man who is always described as "the white hope" of the American drama. Opinion on him is divided. Some critics contend that he will write the great American drama. Others challenge this contention and retort that he has already written it. Naturally, Mr. Odets is more modest than some of his admirers. In his many letters to the press he has merely referred to his latest play, *Paradise Lost,* as his most mature play to date.

The criticism of a play by Clifford Odets is, at this date, an extremely difficult task. To begin with, one must decide with whom he his to be compared. He has already been compared with Chekhov. And in the introduction to *Three Plays* by Clifford Odets, Mr. Harold Clurman, director of the Odets plays, demurs, insisting that O'Casey is a more apt comparison. Heywood Broun, in writing of *Paradise Lost,* declares that Odets is greater than O'Neill ever has been or ever will be. Robert Forsythe, in the *New Masses,* writes that the faults in Odets are as inconsequential as are the faults in Tolstoy, Theodore Dreiser and Thomas Wolfe. Some time ago in a newspaper column there was a note announcing a series of lectures by a college professor on the subject to *The Drama from Aristophanes to Clifford Odets.* And in his many letters to the newspapers, explaining his plays, Mr. Odets invariably seems to talk of himself, Ibsen, Chekhov and Sean O'Casey. Also, in a public speech Mr. Odets proved that Shakespeare, Bach, Beethoven, Walt Whitman and Goethe were all propagandists, and that he himself was a propagandist; and he was hence able to draw the conclusion that he was in good company. I might, of course, compare Mr. Odets with Strindberg, but frankly I do not think that that would be an appropriate comparison, and I really do not think that there is a resemblance between Clifford Odets and Strindberg.

Since, then, there is no one else with whom I might compare Mr. Odets, I shall have to fall back on a comparison of Mr. Odets with himself. Odets rose to his present public position very quickly, and on the strength of three plays, *Waiting for Lefty, Awake and Sing* and *Till the Day I Die. Waiting for Lefty* was an alive, exciting, even electrifying one-act, agit-prop play, which revealed a genuinely capable young playwright who possessed a vigorous talent for dialogue, and some capacity for characterization. *Awake and Sing* was a competent, moving and extremely well done, well cast, and well presented play of Bronx family life. Its first two acts were more satisfactory than the last one, because in the last act we were shown a tendency toward speech making which has become even more noticeable in his latest play. Withal it was a sound play, and again revealed a talent for dialogue and characterization. *Till the Day I Die,* which was based on notes from Billinger's *Fatherland,* was transmuted into an adolescent nightmare.

In *Paradise Lost,* Mr. Odets sets out to write both a play and a treatise on civilization. The theme of the play is the death of the middle class and the creation of a new world. It establishes a kind of structure of events whereby the past of the middle class was a paradise, the present is a time of stress and crisis and the future will be another paradise. On its face this is a structure of events which must be repugnant to Marxists, revolutionaries, materialists. It implicitly counterposes two utopias, one past and one future. Dialectics, in the Marxian sense, exists only as a kind of hiatus in the present.

The characters in *Paradise Lost* are all presented both as human beings in their own right and as symbols. I am not certain of many of the symbolical meanings of the characters. If the reader must know the symbolical meanings, he may find some of them in the author's letters to the press. The scene of the play is laid in a large and ugly home, where two families live, the Gordons and the Katzes—both families supported from the pocketbook factory that is run by the partnership of Katz and Gordon. Katz is a hard-boiled and realistic business man who cuts wages and finally ruins the business by stealing the funds. He is also impotent, this being a symbolical suggestion of the nature of the middle class. Mrs. Katz is some kind of a moron who follows Katz around the stage, picking up his coat. Gordon senior is supposedly the middle class of liberal tendency. He spends three acts lengthening his face, wondering what life means and never knowing what time it is, to use the vernacular. His wife is a bourgeois mama who is always trying to tell papa what time it is. There are three children. One is a boy dying from sleeping sickness, who has previously been a bank clerk. He wanders around the stage for three acts, muttering symbolically about the stock market in order to prove the death of the middle class, and it is very difficult to tell just what he means. At all events, sleeping sickness is here another of Mr. Odets's symbols. The second son is a champion Olympic runner who can no longer run because of a bad heart. He marries in the first act, sells rubber dolls in the second while a gangster is cuckolding him off-stage and then he is shot in a stick-up. The third is a girl who is a very fine pianist and who cannot secure work. Her boy friend is a violinist, and neither can he get a job. He goes to Chicago in Act One, and never returns. The girl plays a piano, wanders meaninglessly around the stage, and at one point shrilly cries that she is not sex-starved. Then there is family friend, Gus Michaels, who is the kind of a person that we call an idiot. There are other characters who wander around the stage, coming into and out of the play for some reason or other and to be some kind of a symbol. There are two hoboes who symbolize the working class in patches and tatters. There is a broken-down furnace man who is always happening in and out to expostulate. In the play he seems to be the author's walking delegate. There is a taxi-driver turned gangster, who is the stock type of stage and movie and exists merely as a string of gags. There are one or two more, and they pop in, pop out, and everybody is moving around. In Act Three the Gordons are being evicted, and a high point of pathos is reached. Gus Michaels has collected stamps all his life. He sells his stamp collection for two hundred and fifty dollars, and this is tragic; and he offers the money to the Gordons.

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At all events the Gordons have lost their paradise, and they are going out into the world, poor. Mr. Gordon brings down the curtain with a long speech translating into bad poetry Engels' conception of the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.

I submit that *Paradise Lost* is a burlesque on Mr. Odets's work. What the play fundamentally lacks is understanding. Lacking understanding—both of the characters and the social processes in which they are thrown—there is no motivation. The people are travesties. Many of the lines are gags. Others are dull speeches and swaggering platitudes. It leaves me in open-mouthed wonder. I do not understand how the man who wrote *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing* could have written a play so consistently, so ferociously bad. And it is mistitled. It should be known to the world as *Lay Down and Die.*

Albert Bein is remembered for his play of several years ago, *Little Ol' Boy,* a moving drama of the life of boys confined to a reform school, and a social document of definite value. It was a play with genuine feeling and understanding, but it had only a short run. It was sabotaged by critics, and badly advertised, and now it is in the limbo of unsuccessful plays. This year, Albert Bein has come forth with *Let Freedom Ring,* a dramatization of Grace Lumpkin's novel, *To Make My Bread.* The pattern of events in this play is a common and familiar one to workers in a capitalist society. It tells the story of a people living in a simple economy in the mountains. By direct economic pressures they are driven away from their native habitat and into a factory system. They carry with them a sense of their traditions and their dignity as human beings. In the factory system they are treated as functions of a mill, crushed down, until they die of pellagra, are maimed, broken and twisted in many ways. Gropingly, they arrive at some understanding of the process in which they are trapped. Driven to anger more than to despair, they strike. Their strike is not simply a fight for economic demands. It is also a defense of their integrity as human beings. Their leader, a member of their own clan, has returned to lead them in their strike. After provocation, their leader is murdered, but they continue in their struggle. As a play, *Let Freedom Ring* is a moving and solid achievement, enhanced by the poetic language of the mountain people. It is something which no one should miss seeing.

Before presenting *Let Freedom Ring,* the Theatre Union put on *Mother,* by Berthold Brecht, an adaptation of Gorky's *Mother,* translated from the German. If I might judge from the translated comments of Berthold Brecht at a reception given in his honor, and by an explanation presented by Stanley Burnshaw in the *New Masses,* Brecht has his own theories of his plays and the theatre. In brief, his theory is that the theatre is a kind of school, where people are taught. His conception, then, is of drama as education. *Mother,* the story of the education of a working-class mother in the class struggle and the revolutionary movement, can thus be accepted as a kind of walking school-house. The mechanics of the stage are all brought into the open, the setting is the most simple, there are pianos on the stage for songs that are interlarded between the scenes, there are elocution pieces, there are old-fashioned asides and there is a screen on which slogans and pictures are flashed.

Mother, it seems to me, might have been a satisfactory play to present to an audience which has not yet emerged from illiteracy. It is over-simplified to the degree that every emphasis which the author seeks to make is made in double and in triple. The character will say in an aside what he or she is going to say or do. Then, they do it. At the opening of scene the screen will flash on the point of the scene, telling the audience that Ivan's brother will not speak to him. The audience knows that Ivan's brother will not speak to him, because at this stage of the play Ivan's brother is a school teacher with contempt for the revolution. So the audience deduces that Ivan's brother will not speak to him. The screen tells it that Ivan's brother will not speak to him. And the scene then proves beyond the ultimate indication of a doubt that Ivan's brother will not speak to him, because Ivan's brother does not speak to him. At another point the teacher is instructing the workers in reading and writing. He writes out for them the words "worker" and "exploiter." The screen flashes these two words in large black letters against a white background, demonstrating to the audience that beyond the possibility of a doubt you spell out worker in the letters W-O-R-K-E-R, and that you spell out exploiter in the letters E-X-P-L-O-I-T-E-R. The possibilities of the screen are completely thrown away, the simplicity of the play is over-stressed and it is fair to assume that Brecht, in insisting on this kind of an adaptation of his play for an American audience, was simply indulging himself. Such an effort is unnecessary revolutionary snobbery. *Mother* was an illustrated lecture which assumed that audiences in New York, audiences which had seen and understood such a sound and moving play as *Sailors of Cattaro,* were capable of understanding very little. Its withdrawal for *Let Freedom Ring,* which had failed uptown, was wise.

Squaring the Circle, a translation and an adaptation of a Russian success by Katayev, is a farce of Russian youth of eight years ago. Most of them are members of the Young Communist League, and they live in an apartment house in Moscow where there is much overcrowding. This leads to a farcical situation where two newlywed comples are forced to live in one room. Their zealous over-seriousness about their revolutionary duties adds much humor to the play, until it is alive and crackling. Earlier this year there was an attack on this play, begun by Michael Gold in the *Daily Worker.* He contended that the play was anti-Soviet, but in a symposium in which he, Dmitri Ostrov, the director, and others participated, all of his charges were, I feel, most convincingly answered by the play itself and by the remarks of Mr. Ostrov. As propaganda it is, I feel, of real value to the Soviet Union. As a play it is consistently humorous, and the humor rises out of a real situation rather than a phony one.

Earlier in the season, The Group Theatre presented *Weep for the Virgins,* a story of cannery workers in San Diego, by Nelissa Child. The background of the play was such that it could have been made into something. However, it was just a mess. The most important character in the play, the mother of the virgins who are forced along various destruc-

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tive routes by social pressures, is interpreted as a kind of Broadway wisecracker. As such, she somehow got into the wrong play. This, bad direction and an apparent misunderstanding of the potentialities of the material no matter how badly it may or may not have been written, resulted in something very stiff. The story was focussed through family relationships, and not one relationship was convincingly established. Nobody actually meant anything to anybody else. So the virgins died painlessly, and that was no loss.

If one briefly summarizes, one perceives that the left-wing theatre and plays that are close to the viewpoint of the left-wing theatre are not consistently justifying the promises made for them. Not this season. The only left-wing drama which I think is, or was, worth seeing is *Let Freedom Ring*. And to this might be added the play brought out under commercial auspices, *Squaring the Circle*.

JAMES T. FARRELL

NEVERTHELESS IT MOVES

PERIOD STUFF, all of it lousy with color and authentic detail, dominated the turn of the year. If you are a genuine addict, one who regards Hollywood movies as the lowest form of opiate on earth and you can't get enough of it, most of these will do. They manage to fill the bill for us unfortunate sub-humans (moving blindly in our shadowy half-world) who have to have at least two shots of this particular dream-powder every week. It is understood, of course, that our standard of excellence is a simple, brass-tack affair. We ask of a movie only that it gives the eyes and ears a gentle two-hour massage, does not gag us, leaves no hangover and never under any circumstances makes us think—think, that is, about the screwballs who glue these things together and their frequently sinister purposes.

History as presented by Hollywood, in its current seizure, is an album of very picturesque Christmas cards, book-marks and tin-types thumbed over very, very rapidly. As stated, the surface detail is always reasonably accurate, and the success of these pictures is measured by the determination with which their producers have stuck to the surface, refusing to attempt any explanation at all for any social phenomena whatsoever. The trick is to concentrate on the lovers' close-up and to let the multitude in the background go its own --purely spectacular—way. In this connection it can be recalled that the big American film of 1935, *The Informer*, succeeded because it so scrupulously avoided reference to the political and economic issues that made its central drama possible.

Captain Blood, reaching back into the Seventeenth Century, will lull the spectator to a satisfactory state of suspended animation. This must be at least the tenth time that Sabatini's buccaneer-wins-girl-and-riches story has been run through the wringer, and by now, with all that practice, they've got it just about perfect. Unless your reviewer has been duped, and the present *Captain Blood* is in fact the same one that already seemed perfect in 1926. This is possible, but I don't see that it matters.

Leaving the Seventeenth Century we come to the Eighteenth, and *A Tale of Two Cities* covers it nicely. It is exactly like every picture of the French Revolution you ever saw, with nothing omitted and nothing changed, except that I believe they have a new guillotine—a minor but gratifying improvement that does not disturb the iron conventions of Hollywood's classic Revolution scenario. It is true that consciousness stirs painfully in the soul of even the most drugged and stupefied addict at that point in the film where the proletariat seizes power, and as usual Red Dripping Vengeance Runs Maniacally Amok. But this particular piece of cheese is so much a tradition with these Bastille pictures that after a while it comes to have a certain quaint charm of its own, and even in Soviet America, along with movies of the French Revolution that make sense, I will still hanker for that old favorite, the toothless crone in the overseas cap, who knits and chuckles horribly while heads roll.

And then with *Annie Oakley*, the Nineteenth Century comes to bat. This film, with love's hazard reduced to a pleasant minimum, moves along at a brisk pace and leaves no scars. Joel Sayre and John Twist have loaded it with everyone you ever heard about in connection with Buffalo Bill and that era, including Ned Buntline and Sitting Bull, and to hell with the facts. Remind me, by the way, to tell you about a little idea of my own for a scenario, that came to me after viewing this picture and watching Shirley Temple go to work on Abraham Lincoln in *The Littlest Rebel*. It seems, in my super-film, that George Washington has just signed a pardon for John Brown, because Sylvia Sydney asks him to, and General Sheridan's justly famous ride brings it to the foot of the gallows in the nick of time. It would take too long to tell you the whole story, but from this start the picture proceeds at top speed to a terrific conclusion that shows a group of Bolsheviks mourning at the bier of Nicholas II, and if you happen to work for M-G-M, don't fail to mention where you stole the idea.

Lastly our own century, year 1906, is done up with a blatant picturesqueness in *Ah Wilderness!* a formula story of youth's flights and fancies (No. 2, or comic version) from the play by Eugene O'Neill. Accurately rendered, and carried on the broad backs of Lionel Barrymore and Wallace Beery, and in the capable hands of Aline McMahon, the screen edition will not make Mr. O'Neill turn in his grave. Another critic has said that if you are middle-aged you will enjoy it. This is true, but to get the full flavor you should really be about a hundred and fifty. Unless, of course, you too are an absolutely incurable fiend.

But somehow the season's outstanding film, not widely noted, may well be a certain short thing, the name of which I have forgotten, about marine life. It seems that the octopus lays its eggs in grape-like bunches, and over these the mother octopus mounts guard with all fifty of its arms and legs, an incredibly human zeal and affection manifest in each. Then the mother octopus tangles—and I mean tangles!—with a pirate octopus. This stuff beats the historians of Hollywood forty ways, and what a cast, what feeling, what fidelity to fact!

KENNETH FEARING

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CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors:

I'm sorry I've been so slow in answering your request for a statement on the merger of *Partisan Review* and *The Anvil;* I have been terribly busy. I'm sincerely pleased to hear that the magazine is to be a literary monthly; there has been a great need for a good, honest, aggressive one for a long time. Also, I feel confident that the editors are capable of answering that need if the writers of the country will give them intelligent and sustained support. Reading a good many unpublished manuscripts and talking with a number of talented writers whose work has not yet received recognition has convinced me that there is a wealth of material awaiting publication, a large number of writers whose talents would mature if they received the guidance and criticism that publication inevitably brings with it. Moreover, we have passed the stage of indiscriminating support of writing on the basis of its political and theoretical position. There is a need—a healthy, old-fashioned, crying need—for critical leadership. There is scarcely an established—that is to say, a bourgeois—critic in this country who commands, or deserves, even the elementary respect of the younger generation of writers. Their concept of criticism has been reduced to simple logrolling, and they are inexpert and obtuse even in that. Their knowledge of politics, and their understanding of theory, amounts to an incapacity to deal with either; and in the past few years the young writers of the country have witnessed the edifying spectacle of eminent critics expressing banalities that a Young Pioneer would be ashamed to answer. The combined *Partisan Review and Anvil* has an opportunity to take over intellectual leadership in the field of creative literature such as no other publication in the history of this country has possessed; it can become the dominant influence in the intellectual lives of the serious and sincere writers of this period. The difficulties are enormous, but the potential value to American culture is sufficiently great to justify any and every effort to overcome them.

Sincerely,

Robert Cantwell

To the Editors:

Your letter reached me while I was on a lecture trip, motoring all day and speaking in the evening, and all I could do with my mail was to put it in a bag and wait until I got home. Perhaps it is now too late for my comments on recent proletarian literature.

Of course I am happy to see the rapid growth of this literature. Having turned into a politician for the last couple of years, I cannot read as much as I used to, but I read a great deal about this literature and occasionally I get a chance to read a book. The whole tone and temper of American literature has changed since I became familiar with it some thirty-five years ago. The workers are finding a voice, and of course I am happy about it.

Sometime when I am not so crowded as at present, I will try to write you my detailed impressions. In the meantime, my fraternal greetings to all the young writers who are facing the realities of the class struggle.

Sincerely,

Upton Sinclair

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